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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DECEMBER  
1992

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Ian McDonald  
John Sladek  
and others

Douglas Adams Interview

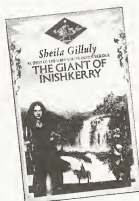
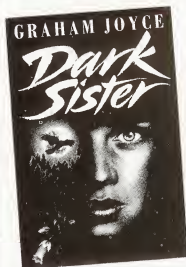


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# interzone

## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

**No 66****December 1992**

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# Fritz Leiber

25 December 1910 – 5 September 1992

There has been no figure more honoured in the world of science fiction than Fritz Leiber, and no one more elusive. Though he gained more of the field's numerous awards than did more famous contemporaries like Robert A. Heinlein and Isaac Asimov, he never came to dominate the field as they did. More subtle and more boisterous than any of his peers, he was also perhaps more damaged than any of them, and his career suffered from his intermittent disappearances from public view, sometimes for years on end.

These absences were caused by severe alcoholism, about which Leiber wrote openly; but the sympathy and love of his colleagues could not rescue him from having to restart his career more than once. Like Heinlein and Asimov, Leiber began to publish in 1939, and like them his first significant editor was John W. Campbell Jr. of *Astounding Science Fiction*, though Leiber's first story was published in *Unknown*, a sister magazine which gave its authors scope to indulge in a wide range of fantasy. Within a few years he wrote for Campbell's magazines two of his most enduring novels, *Gather Darkness!* (1950, in book form) and *Conjure Wife* (1953, in book form), the latter being twice filmed.

After at least one long intermission, he then went on to publish a large number of stories and books in a wide variety of modes, including *The Green Millennium* (1953), a satirical version of the United States, *The Big Time* (1961), a closet-drama time-travel tale told with such claustrophobic concision that it could easily be transferred to the stage; and *The Wanderer* (1964), a rambling and exuberant science-fiction epic full of wisdom and chutzpah. Again and again he returned to the field; and each new book seemed a new start.

To one series, however, he stayed faithful for the whole of his long life; and it may be for his many fantasy tales about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser that Leiber will be best remembered and most loved. Starting with "Two Sought Adventure" (1939), which was Leiber's first published story, and continuing until the end of his active writing career, this sequence gave the subgenre of "sword-and-sorcery" (a term he invented in 1960) a maturity and sanity it did not elsewhere possess.

The friendship of the gullible Nordic Fafhrd with the trickster-like Mouser provided the field with a convincing model of adult heterosexual pair-bonding; and their adventures, hilarious and secular and sly, influenced generations of imitators. In *The Knight and Knave of Swords* (1988), a collection which contains the last of these tales, Leiber closed off his own career by commemorating the long fight against death of Harry Fischer, the close friend and fellow alcoholic who first fabricated the two characters in letters written in 1934. In the series, the Gray Mouser was based on Fischer, and Fafhrd, long-limbed and bumbling and vulnerable, was Leiber's vision of his own personality.

Tall, gangling, gregarious, theatrical and melancholic, Leiber indeed made a plausible Fafhrd. From his birth in Chicago in 1910 to actor parents – the Fritz Leiber who appears in standard encyclopaedias of film was his father – he led a life marked by stress, penury and flashes of good fortune. His first marriage lasted until the death of his wife Jonquil Stephens in 1969, and his son Justin has become a well-known writer; four months ago, already seriously ill, Fritz Leiber married Sergio Skinner, his companion for the previous two decades. For much of his life he held down full-time jobs, while at

the same time coping with his addiction and managing to write 40 books; in his seventies he was still wrestling with his drinking problem, but in his last decades he was able to produce his best work.

Through the supernatural Gothic intricacies of *Our Lady of Darkness* (1977), his last major novel, glows a muscular decency, and an awareness of the complex realities of modern urban life, that arguably did much to shape the modern genre of urban fantasy. In this late prime he also wrote several moving tales, like "Catch That Zeppelin!" (1975) and "Black Glass" (1978), in which autobiography and fantasy meet with a strange, serene gaiety. Inside the field of science-fiction fantasy, his heirs include James Blaylock and Tim Powers; outside the field, urban fantasists like Mark Helprin show signs of his haunted compassion.

In the end, however, Leiber was too various to found a single tradition. Nor, unlike many of his contemporaries, was he a dreamer of abstract visions. As the 44 tales assembled in *The Leiber Chronicles: Fifty Years of Fritz Leiber* (1990) demonstrate, his main legacy was an inclination of mind and spirit toward the given. He was a lover of the world.

(John Clute)

The above piece first appeared in *The Independent*, 14th September 1992.

## Interaction

Dear Editors:

I enclose my first year's subscription for *Interzone*. I have been an avid reader of sf novels for some 22 years, but have only recently started on sf magazines. The reason for this is simple and also pertinent to a slight reservation I wish to express concerning my subscription.



I have never read sf mags in the past because they were, and still are, very difficult to find. At the present time I know of only one shop which sells *Interzone*, and that is a few hours' round trip by car. Nevertheless that little shop in Glasgow is where I first saw your magazine and where I have bought all my copies until now.

So what?

So that is one less customer buying *IZ* from one of the few (maybe the only, for all I know) shops in this area which specialize in sf and fantasy mags. I want to support that shop and to make sure that it stays in business so that I can make my periodic trips there to see what's on the market.

So why the subscription now?

Simply because I now want to write sf as well as read it and you make it very plain that you want potential contributors to take out subscriptions. I can take a hint.

I do realize the importance of the reliable income generated by subscriptions (I run a small part-time business myself). However I wonder if you have considered encouraging readers to subscribe via their local supplier? It surely must be to your advantage to encourage outlets to stock *IZ* so that potential customers have a chance of seeing it and reassuring themselves that it's not some ghastly comic-book. A small percentage to the shop could be justified by the potential benefits? People would still be free to subscribe directly if they found it more convenient.

I have enjoyed reading *IZ* so far, although not all the stories are to my taste. I particularly liked John Meeney's "Spring Rain" in the July issue.

**Andrew Munley**  
Kilwinning, Scotland

**Editor:** We don't insist that potential contributors become subscribers, simply that they read a few issues of the magazine so that they don't waste their time (and ours) by submitting wildly inappropriate material. The magazine is available via W.H. Smith, John Menzies and Surridge Dowson – the three main newsagents/distributors in the UK – so in theory it can be ordered by any newsagent who makes the effort.

Dear Editors:

I particularly enjoyed issue 62, with three of my favourite authors represented in the pieces by Aldiss, Gwyneth Jones and B.J. Bayley, and the first interview I've seen with a fourth in the words of Michael Swanwick. "Ansible Link" is a welcome diversion, and the two science book reviews were timely, as I was on the verge of spending money on the Big Bang one, and feel pleased to avoid doing so now! Thanks.

Hope to see more adventurous artwork in times to come, and some

audacious fictivity to keep the plodders on their toes would be spice to the banquet, no? And personally I could do without the kind of cod-Victorian fantasies (Wishart) about robotic "personal companions," etc – ghost-in-the-machine stuff like the robot street-sweeper in Italy you published a couple of years or so ago, etc... you already published far more interesting stories about animated doll fetishes a few years ago... who was that stuff by? (You seem to be referring to Richard Corder, whose debut novel, *Dead Girls* – based on the stories we published – is due out soon from HorperCollins – Ed.)

On the other hand I want to thank you and congratulate you on publishing "The Fat People" by Stephen Blanchard in issue 61. I discerned no crumb of sf content in this story, and yet the spirit of the genre cast its tangent light of otherness through the still focus of every word, as the quick disturbing glimpse played in the corner of the eye. More please, I loved this oblique, human tale of the alien within. If only "real" sf could tap that vein more often!

**Syd Foster**  
Swansea

Dear Editors:

Thank you for issue 63 – truly a classic among classics. I was particularly pleased to see the brilliant Nicholas Royle. This is a man who is a consistently good writer and yet mainstream publishers have failed to pick up on him. That I feel is *Interzone's* job, to encourage writers of great skill who do not have wide appeal, and not just the big sellers who look good on the cover. So long may you continue to publish the off-beat, strange and plain weird.

Diane Mapes was up to her usual standard with "She Devil" and David Garnett's "Off the Track" was suitably entertaining. It's a pity that the latter did not find its way into Paul McAuley and Kim Newman's anthology *In Dreams*.

The Colin Greenland interview was one of the most interesting I've read in some time and I think you should take note of his comments when selecting your fiction. I too am tiring of hard sf that contains baffling facts but very little story. Does it matter if the science is all to cock as long as the story is there? I mean, the majority of readers don't understand Chaos theory and quantum mechanics, and can grow bored with too much explanation. It is the sf of Greenland and writers of that ilk which keeps the genre alive and allows hard sf writers to work within the genre.

In the past *Interzone* published too much hard sf, but the last ten issues have seen great improvements. You've discovered such talent as Molly Brown, and I for one am eagerly awaiting

future stories from her. So yes, you're on the right track and I hope you continue to publish stories that entertain with a capital E. It's interesting to note that my wife has started reading my *Interzone*, which goes to prove that you are becoming more accessible to a non-sf reading public.

**Gary M. Dobbs**  
Porth, Wales

Dear Editors:

I do hope you can print this letter, because I want to offer up a very loud round of applause to all the Glasgow people who pitched – successfully – for the World Science Fiction Convention to be held in Britain in 1995.

I've just come back from Magicon, this year's Worldcon. First of all, it was a wonderfully funny experience to see all these people in kilts – in the middle of Florida. But most importantly, I could not go anywhere without encountering leaflets, flyers, posters, all really pushing Glasgow. It was a tremendously hard-working campaign, and huzzah, they won. A worldcon in the UK is excellent news for us all – it's simply great for business.

So well done and thanks to everyone involved.

**Deborah Beale**  
Orion/Millennium

**Editor:** See Dove Longford's "Ansible Link" column in this issue for further information about the Glasgow Worldcon in 1995.

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If you can afford to do so, why not consider supporting this magazine by taking out a very long-term subscription? (We define a "lifetime sub" as one which lasts either the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the magazine.)

We have already been going for ten years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifetime" subscribers bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £260 (UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S. accelerated surface mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

# BIG CHAIR



Ian McDonald

**T**hey wake in the morning to dust. Red dust, drifted in long plumes behind the upright windboards in the lee of which they lay down to sleep the night before. Dust in the desert bags. Dust in the ear, dust in the corner of the eye, in the corners of the mouth. Dust clinging to the sweat of the night like a red crust. As he prepares breakfast, she surveys the forward horizon with her scanshades. The sun is well up, already the heat-haze is flowing and running and filling the land with illusions and uncertainties. She thinks she sees a shadow in the liquid haze; dark discordant shapes, sharp and thrusting. About a day's sail, she thinks. Surely they must be getting close, she thinks.

There is dust in the breakfast.

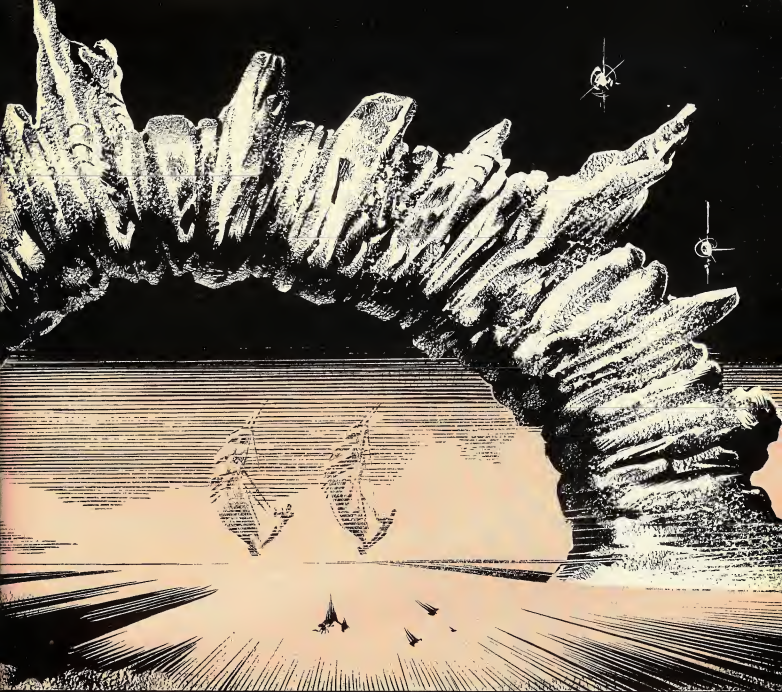
While he checks their position against the signs of the desert that only he can read, she readies the boards, powering up the levitators, balancing cargo fore and aft, unfurling the sails, inspecting the bright coloured fabric for tears and nicks. Her skin darkens under the strengthening sun; child of a pale race, her epidermis has been infected with a photosensitive

melanin-secreting symbiont. Child of a dark race, he has no need of protective melanin. But it excites him to watch her go dark on him.

The long wind swells the sails with a crack and a boom and carries them onward. A dark mass of angularities and sharp thrustings slowly emerges from the veils of heat-haze. As the edge of the world touches the sun, they come upon it: a great half-wheel of stone; thin jagged slabs of rock built into an arch. Spines and spears of jagged stone burst outward; as they arrive, sand-anchors throwing up long tails of dust, the sun is contained whole within the hole at the centre of the sunburst of stone. The artefact dwarfs them, both windboards could sail abreast fully rigged beneath the arch. By the dregs of daylight she records it with her scanshades. Only when it is fully digitized and memorized and digested does she go to press her hands, her left cheek, her right cheek, her left ear, her right ear, her lips against it.

He finds the embers of a fire beneath the stone arch. Old, cold, but with recent memory of burning.

"No more than two days old," he says.



"Close," she says.

She wants him this night. He comes, though he knows it is not him she wants but the one who stopped here and built the stone arch under which they make their love. He comes, because sex to him is remembering. The desert is hard with memory. Kilometre by kilometre, day by day it takes away everything that is not of it and grinds it into red dust; the life he owned before the desert; his memories; his name.

His name...

He was once Jammer.

She was once Safarside.

As they lie together, he inside her, they remember Two Moons Flat.

**T**wo Moons Flat was founded on the concept of intersection. Where the Solstice Landing Grand Trunk Road crossed the Bethlehem Ares Railroads Transpolar freight line at the only crossing in two thousand kilometres either way, something almost like a town had struggled from the desert. Struggled, and died. Struggled, and died. Struggled,

and the third time struck an anchorhold in the scalding soda-flats from which, in honour of its achievement, it took its name. There is Amjandrees the crossing-attendant's junction-box, his dome and his few square metres of irrigated truck garden. There is the Teahouse of the Eighteenth Lorarch across the track from Amjandrees. There are six windpumps, a sun-farm, a microwave relay and a clutter of salt-blasted railroad hulks out of which the hazers have constructed their squats. That is Two Moons Flat.

The trains no longer stop there. The only vehicles that have come up that road in twenty years have been the boardrunners, pennants and banners snapping in the wind from the Pole, boards stowed in readyracks, girls in the back with their cut-offs and scanshades and designer melanin and sexy little gloves doin' the hand-jive to All Swing Radio. There are licence plates from all four quarterspheres of Mars behind the Teahouse of the Eighteenth Lorarch.

It is those soda flats that has brought them from Meridian and O and Grand Valley and all the world's dreary places. By day nothing can live out on that

Illustrations by Kevin Callan



white heat, so they sleep in their hollowed-out hulks, or make sweaty, listless love half-listening to the radio, or drink mint tea on the verandah of Rajneesh's establishment. But at night, at night... The flats glow with torches and smudge fires and the boardrunners taste the wind on their tongues and go down to the edge of the deadlands, boards carried on their heads, feeling the wind, the night, the spirit of the flats, restless for the off. And it comes, and out they go, sailing out across the flat annihilated land, racing and dodging and weaving to catch every last centimetre from the night wind; far, far racing by the light of the moon-ring and the strange illuminations that shine and shift beneath the surface of the flats. The ones who are left watch, and wait, and watch. The edge of the world touches the sun: the flats flare sudden blinding white, and there, arrowing out of the heat-haze, they come, the boards.

He came for just one night to run the flats. He stayed three years. There was something about the flats, something pure in their utter abstraction and sterility, something perfect. A spirit. Every night he would carry his board above his head down to the place where the scrubby terraform vegetation of the town ended and the flats began, and he would race. Winning no longer mattered to him, even the concept of competition had been lost, he sailed because the spirit of the flats had eaten his soul.

And he called himself Jammer.

**T**he last truck of a hundred-car Bethlehem Ares ore train hauling from Iron Mountain up over the pole had passed the front of Rajneesh's and there was the car like no one had ever seen before. It had tail fins and streamlines and chrome and six (count them) wheels. Those who saw it that day will swear that flims and flams of heat-lightning clung to its streamlines and strakes. It stopped outside the Teahouse of the Eighteenth Lorarch where he sat on the verandah, and the woman got out.

There is an alternative to love at first sight. It is no less instantaneous, no less compelling, no less inescapable, but it is not love. It is the meshing of spirits. When he saw her standing in the light and the dust with the heat-haze reflected in her wrap-round scan-shades, he felt something go out from him: spirit.

She said she was looking for a guide: "To that" (with a horizonward nod of her head).

"No one goes out there," he said, though he knew in that instant that he had been waiting all these wasted years for a reason to point the nose of his board into the heat-haze and sail out of all remembering. "Can you sail?"

"Can it be that hard?" she asked.

"Can you make good love?" he said. "It is no harder than that."

They met in the last echo of a night freight's whistle. She whinnied with nervous excitement as the night-wind tugged at the sail and set the board bobbing and fretting. She was gauche, she was clumsy, she was like a virgin, lacking the grace and ease and pleasure that comes from custom, but with the virgin's enthusiasm and determination to succeed. They sailed far down the empty highway, the promag levitators sending silent dervishes of dust whirling away into the darkness, far from trashed lives and wind-scoured

dreams, into the spare purity of the desert. He saw her tightness, her rigidity, melt and flow and reconfigure themselves, he saw the board change her and knew that they need go no further. The desert had her. He pushed the sail forward and out and sent the board sweeping round in an arc and she came after him and running low and hard, tacking back and forth, back and forth across the Grand Trunk Road to catch the wind, they approached the lights of Two Moons Flat.

They lounged on the bare boards of Rajneesh's verandah, uncapping bottles of rice beer with their teeth beneath a sky lasing blue and green with the launch lasers of a Praesidium Sailship. She unfolded her scan-shades from a zipped-shut pocket of her leather jacket, carefully peeled the label from the refrigerator-dewed beer bottle and pressed the white inside to the lens. The briefest pulse of light sent shadows around the verandah; she unpeeled the label, passed it to him. By skylight he saw printed on the back a colour photograph. A woman. A car. A green hillside, strange to one with the white soda flats in his eyes. On the green hillside, dwarfing woman and car: a huge chair constructed from the trunks of entire trees stripped and lashed together. A chair between the legs of which a Bethlehem Ares Railroads Class 88 locomotive might pass with ease.

"His name, his origins are not known," she said. "All he allows us to know of him are these works he leaves behind him as he passes on his course over the face of the world. I was not the first to discover them, though he is careful only to leave them in remote places far from habitation — perhaps he seeks to conceal the mysteries of his method of construction, perhaps he wishes to demand a certain sacrifice of his followers. Nor was I the first to follow the course of his pilgrimage, but I am the only one to have followed it so far, so purely, the only one who is dedicated to following it to its end, to meeting the mind that writes its signature across entire planets. And day by day, hour by hour, kilometre by kilometre, I am closing on him. Somewhere, out there, in that desert, I will run the clocks down to zero and find him."

"Him," he said. "All the way through, you have said him. How do you know?"

And she knew then, because he asked that, that he would lead her, out into the heat-haze, and beyond.

Safarside. And Jammer.

**T**his desert; they seem to have been sailing across it for all their remembered lives. There must be an end, a place where the purity of stone and grit gives way to life and growth, red to green. Or perhaps time, like light, is distorted by heat into a haze of shifting yesterdays and uncertain tomorrows.

He thinks about that the next day as they sail, that perhaps beyond the desert of stone and the desert of sand and the desert of soda and the desert of dust lies the Desert of Time where the moments are as shifting and mutable as wind-blown sand and a man might, in his pursuit of a legend, himself become the legend that draws him onward.

A blink, a dazzle, the light shifts, and it is gone, shifts again, and the silver heliograph beams out of



the heat dazzle. She has seen it too, that pinprick of blinding light along the edge of the world. They warp their courses toward the light but they both know in the pith of their bones it is not one of his. After an hour following the dazzle they strike a railroad track running straight and undeviating and endless across the red desert. Their boards seem to outrun the wind itself as they follow the steel lines, as if this piece of human geometry has somehow impressed an order of space and time upon the great orderlessness. At the end of the line stands the tower. It is an insect-like thing of girders and modules, a steel mantis with two great praying limbs that are the mirror panels they saw from so far away. The arms track the sun, catching it in their silver paddles, juggling it from hand to hand to hand like a baked yam fresh from the oven.

Like others who have lived too close too long to the heart of the desert, the woman in the sun-tower has forgotten she had a name, forgotten all but disjointed memories of angels flocking over the pantiles of her childhood home on the plains of Great Oxus, of a yearning to be swallowed by the sky, of nights whispering seductions to a Bethlehem Ares automated tracklayer, stroking its pistons, licking its tokamak housing until she persuaded it to take her out across the desert in pursuit of angels, it laying its own track before it until there, at the place where the angels sang loudest, she ordered the machine to dismantle itself into this tower, this divine heliograph. In her theology, angels are creations of the infinite regress of the reflection between heaven and earth, caught between God and humanity, mortality and immortality, finitude and eternity. She shows, as parents will show pictures of their children to those who do not care much less understand, her videotapes of fleeting somethings; feedback angels, quicksilver creatures of the light caught between her spirit-mirrors.

They eat vegetables and synthetics from her hydroponics module while the mirror arms click and grind and gyre on their search for angels. The two women talk, of angels, and artists. The old woman tells the young woman that yes, she has seen a traveller, just two weeks before, well, she thinks it is two weeks, how sure can one be of anything to do with time in this place? Not close, no well, just a shiver in the general shimmer of the heat-haze, like them, riding a windboard, she thinks.

The woman who once was Safarside will not sleep with him that night. He wonders if it is because she now feels herself almost within reach of touching the hem of the Maker's garment. He listens to the arms swinging through the night, hunting for angels, the angel of memory.

**T**hat first morning, when wind filled the sails with a strong, sudden crack and Two Moons Flat and all its waste and sterility fell away behind him, he had been filled with the most joy in his life. As they had sailed he had taught her the ways of the desert; of navigation, of the names and nature of sands, of the hundred forms the wind might take according to season and quarter, the art of finding the ancient ocean buried deep in the earth, and how the perfusion generator would summon it up through rock and sand into the sip wells he dug and lined with black plastic.



"Taste," he had said, "you will never taste water like that anywhere else. That is liquid history, that water. That is all the history of the world." In that slip of water, he had moved, like some unseen landmark between the edgeland and the deep desert, from fascination to love. And on the night when the first big dust storm had come spilling across the land he had lain in his desert bag with the opaque walls of hyper-sonic dust scratching the plastic bubble, thinking about her, so close beside him yet invisible in the storm, two souls sealed in their private hermetic universes and realized that it was love now. No helping it. The next storm, he had vowed, they would share together; two bodies in one bag, two souls beneath one plastic bubble.

Of course, there never was another dust storm.

All the next day he had practised the words, the difficult ones that men so want to say but find so hard. He could feel them coming, coming, the words, in a thrill, a rush and spurt; he was going to say them, nothing would stop him, and she was scanning the horizon, peering into the heat-haze, and as the words touched his tongue she said, "There, look. Ahead of us. On the same line, just as I predicted," and the words fled from him and never came back again.

They had come cutting in across the grit-scoured stone pavement toward the irregular latticework of interwoven tree branches, stripped bare of bark and polished to kiss-smoothness by the dust storm. She marvelled that it had withstood the blast. She photographed and imaged and digitized the sculpture from every aspect and marked its position on her maps and how it fitted into the Grand Scheme that seemed part of a huge ideogram, a proclamation of sentience, inscribed across the face of Mars, and he had wished that he might be able to excite her as much, no, more, than this construction of inarticulate wood and stone.

The night she found the curious construction of fused sand, like a room of many porticos each looking out upon a different horizon; that night when the stars caught in those windows seemed like the constellations of other worlds or other times, she asked him to sleep with her. Afterwards, he lay awake, as men are expected to, listening to the wind from the edge of the world dissolve away the impacted sand walls that surrounded them, grain by grain by grain. He asked himself those pointless questions that assume a vital significance at that hour of the night and no other. *Whys and wherefores*, analyses of motivations and motives. Rejoice, he concluded. Analysis is fruitless, she came to you, and you were glad. That is the only valid interpretation. He slept with a smile on his face for the first time since the flop-sweat days in Two Moons Flat. That was the last time he could remember being a discrete person, before he and she and the desert and the sculptor melted and melded and merged in the heat of the sun.

He is late for breakfast; the old woman busies herself with the rituals of mint tea and she, night-pale under the artificial lights, tells him of a dream she had of greenness. Will they find some new and marvellous artefact on this day's sail? Surely she cannot be far behind him now, why, even this day, they might...

Disquieted, he takes his tea and goes to fill the board

tanks from the old woman's dew traps. He does not want to catch up with the Maker. He does not want all to end. It has become everything for him, this journey, this exalted flight across the desert, with her and the boards and the wind. He cannot think of what might happen after it is over. He wishes that the desert might go on forever, so that it will not have to be over.

The old woman blesses them on their way with gifts of salt and bread. As the boards draw speed from the wind, he turns to wave and sees it. He calls to her: look. There. Caught between the mirrors, a dazzle that for one moment becomes something more than reflected light, a spectrum of possibilities: wings, silver sails, the legendary air-sharks of Grand Valley folk tales, torpedoes, two streamlined rocketships all portholes and tailfins, comets, Catherine wheels; angels.

Gone.

Within the hour, they see the pattern of green in the heat-haze. It is a maze of fused glass, inviting the traveller in with graceful simplicity, within minutes complexifying into a mandala of interlacing glass lines that strive toward the boundaries of mathematics and abruptly stop.

She peels off her salt-stained glove, touches the glass.

"How?"

"Partacs," he says. "Orbital weapons." He imagines the violet beams of the orbital defences dancing across the sand to the command of a different caller; honouring partners, *allemand left, allemand right*.

"I know," she says, peeling off her scanshades and squinting at the sky. "I know what he's saying to me. He's setting me a puzzle; a maze of meanings and motivations and reasons and artistic statements that the more I try to understand, the more it defies me. What he is saying about this artefact, about the whole pilgrimage, is that there is no message. It is what it is. No more and no less."

He touches the glass now with the palm of his hand.

"Still warm." He calculates what he knows of the cooling curves of glasses. Which is no great deal. "He cannot be more than a day ahead of us. A few hours, even."

They sail on. He smells it long before he sees it, and when he sees it, it is nothing to look at. Just a small, ugly, desert bush. But it is the edge of the end. That one small, tough, ugly bush will become five, and ten, and many, and there will be scrub and tussock grass and then small terraform trees, and cacti ten, twenty, thirty metres tall, and arrowbush and desert gum and lightning tree, and agave and the tiny, delicate bells of the desert orchids. The desert will end. But the sculpture pilgrimage will lead onward, into soft green hills, where there is no need for a man skilled in the ways of the desert, where there is no need to know the names of the sands and the winds according to their season and quarter, where there is no need to smell out the ancient oceans buried millennia deep beneath the rocks. No need. No more.

He wants to, that night when they bank their boards up with scavenged stones. He wants to because it is the last night and he must have something to take with him. But she does not read the signs and he does not ask her. He has understood from the first that it was not his to ask. Long after she has rolled over in her

bag into sleep he can smell the green hills and the people and the voices and the faces and the lives down beyond the edge of the world. Others. If he cannot bear to share her with even the Maker, how much harder will it be with all those faces, all those voices, all those other lives?

**T**he next day he watches her turn dark in the desert sun and they sail out of the red desert. The heat-haze evaporates and before them is a land of scrub and shrub and terraform saguaro cactus. Cactus bats have hollowed out the tops of the cactus towers. From each hole black eyes watch the boards tacking between the tall cacti, over the carpet of orchids and poppies. As the desert is lost behind them over the edge of the world it is as if they are waking from a long and involved dream and the pieces of their pasts the desert took from them are returned.

They reach the edge of a scarp. The land falls away sheer before them into the low hills and eroded impact craters of Deuteronomy, a green land scattered with ten thousand trees. On the scarp edge, they become themselves again. Safarside. And Jammer.

Jammer knows it will not be long now. He knows there will never be a better time than this for Safarside, a better place than this place overlooking Deuteronomy. He is fool enough, or still in love enough, to want to make it easy for her.

He says that he supposes she will not be needing a guide now they have come to the edge of the desert. (Though it is needles in his eyes to say it.)

She says yes, she supposes so.

He wonders what she will do now.

She reckons she will sail the board to a town, sell it, pick up a car, follow the trail to the ending.

And what if there is no ending? What if the whole message of the pilgrimage is that true pilgrimages never end, what if it leads her on and on, wrapping the thread of her life around and around the world?

She will follow. Down under the ten thousand thousand trees, out across the world, wherever it leads.

And is there a place for him, down under those trees, across the rest of the world?

She looks at him as if he is a kind of idiot too stupid even to imagine.

And he understands. Always, always, it had been the Maker she had been in love with. That first time, that time under the rock arch, every time; the receding silhouette of the Maker – man, woman, angel, god, vanishing into the shimmering.

She thanks him for his services. Didn't they have some time together, rare, strange, holy? She will never forget him and their passage of the great desert and how he has helped her on her journey. They will make stories about them some day, the ones who sailed and sailed and sailed. See if they do not. She wonders how he will get back to Two Moons Flat again. She has money; here, take it, for you, for your services.

He hits her. It feels nothing like as good as he thought it would. There is not even any satisfaction in the look of dawning comprehension on her face as she shakes the dust and humiliation from her and picks up the scanshades from where they have fallen and examines the hairline crack across the lens. He

turns his board and plunges recklessly, heedlessly, down the steep scarp slope, hoping to be smashed into annihilation by the adamant earth.

Services. An itch to be scratched.

She had never loved him. He wished they were still two nameless creatures, forgetful of everything except the chain of sculptures drawing them onward through a desert of time that eternally slips away beneath their boards only to recreate itself before them from the heat-haze. But it was illusion, mirage, a trick of the heat and the light that seemed real, like the angels caught in the hands of the light-tower. Real enough for him to love it in return. With deadly revelation comes understanding. A huge, incredible certainty, as if he has been touched by the hand of God the Panarchic. In the desert of time where time is as shifting and mutable as blown sand, he and she ceased to be discrete people and became legends. And now beyond the desert of time, the legend goes on, into the world again. The legend must go on.

He knows what he has to do now, and how he is to do it. The magnitude of the task does not daunt him. He sees the prize far behind him and at the same time far ahead of him, in the great Martian desert.

**I**n the morning he finds them in the hollow of the hillside not far from where he tethered the board to sleep the night beneath one of Deuteronomy's ten thousand thousand trees. A few metres more in the night and he would have missed them altogether. But he was meant to find them. All before him, all behind him, whipped up into a dust devil somewhere in the desert of time. How the logs and trunks come to be here he cannot guess. The hand of God. The hand of man. A miracle, wrought back there in the desert of time, where he and she were caught up in the timeless, angel-space of heat-haze reflected between red sand and red sky. But there they are, the logs, and seeing them he knows what he has to do with them so that the circle of time may be closed and the only woman he ever loved – ever will love – will come to him on a verandah in Two Moons Flat and ask him to take her out beyond the edge of knowing.

There is rope in his panniers, and a folding shovel for digging foundations. He has never performed a more grinding, strenuous task than hauling those logs into the footings he has dug for them, lashing them together, heaving the cross members into position and fixing them. But when your work is a work of the heart it makes even the most arduous task a little lighter.

He looks back, once, at the big chair standing on the green hillside. One look is enough. He runs lightly onto his board and the wind fills the sail and carries him away over the green hills of Deuteronomy. One look is enough: the ideas, the plans, the crazy notions are tumbling through his mind like that thousand thousand satellites of the morning. There are many tasks to be done, and anyway, he has heard, distant but growing closer, the sound of the engine of a big, black six-wheeled car, like no one has ever dreamed a car could be.

# Reinventing the Wheel

## John Sladek

"Freudians long ago observed, probably with a smirk, that riding a bicycle might well be a substitute for sexual congress. But I'd maintain the contrary: sex is simply the primitive precursor of the ideal, riding your bike. Can any orgasm equal the feeling of freewheeling down a steep hill? And wasn't it worth labouring up the hill, groaning and panting through all of the gears of foreplay, to achieve that sublime feeling at the top?"

— D'Arcy Middlers

Last year, in the course of my research into the life and ancestry of D'Arcy Middlers, the bicycle billionaire, I came across a privately-printed family history called *The Chattalots: a Family in Peace and War*. Although Middlers claims to be distantly related to the Chattalots, the connection is by no means clear. In the entire volume, I found no hints that any of the Chattalots shared his fascination with bicycles, except perhaps for Lady Emmeline Chattalot (1855-1914). Her story follows.

It was in 1889 that Lady Emmeline Chattalot decided to take part in the new craze of cycling, of which she had read so much. Was she moved by the idea of healthful exercise and fresh air? Pedalling off to country picnics where the sexes might mix freely without chaperones? Perhaps her true motives will never be known.

In any event, her ladyship ordered up a tricycle built to her own design. She saw no reason why cycling need be uncomfortable; her design incorporated a horsehair sofa, a rosewood wine table, cupboards for extra clothing and parlour games, stout boxes for cigars, a tantalus with three decanters, a combination dressing table and commode, a telescoping mahogany dining table and sideboard, and a jewel safe. The whole device, once fitted with a folding marquee in case of inclement weather, weighed several tons and required the strenuous pedalling efforts of two footmen for locomotion on its great iron-rimmed wheels, whenever it made a foray into the streets of Belgravia.

The Chattalot cycle did not actually make many such forays. Motion was a problem. For one thing, the monumental inertia of the beast made it rather a chore to start. A dozen grooms were required to push it along the mews until the two footmen could pedal madly enough to keep it going.

Even after launching, once the cycle was actually in motion, there remained the problem of steering. Narrow streets were out of the question. Even on

broad thoroughfares, the width and unwieldiness of the titanic machine placed other vehicles in extreme danger. Unless the cycle were moving perfectly straight along the way, in perfect parallel to the street, which it seldom was, others were forced to give way. Cabs veered, carriages climbed kerbs, and on one occasion, a heavy goods wagon was overturned, dumping thousands of gas mantles at Sloane Square. Horses who spotted the monster tended to bolt, screaming and rolling their eyes, possibly afflicted with some ancestral memory of rhinoceros attacks.

Like as not, the commotion would attract the attention of a policeman, who would annoyingly stop her ladyship's cycle. "Here, what's all this, then?" he would say, and not rhetorically. He would begin a frankly amazed inspection of his mahogany posts, each stout as Jumbo's leg. (Jumbo's actual leg was mounted at the rear, holding a cluster of umbrellas and walking sticks.) "What's all this, then?" He genuinely wanted to know, but the exhausted footmen were inevitably too breathless to provide any particulars, while her ladyship would normally choose to remain out of public view.

Sometimes, after stopping for a mishap or a police inspection, the conveyance would dally for too long, so that a pack of interested children would gather to shout catcalls and throw stones. Like as not, the exhausted footmen would be obliged to descend from their stirrups, seize walking sticks from Jumbo's leg, and lay about the crowd. This would stir up a local costermonger or two, and then the policeman would be obliged to sort things out. Often, a drunken gentleman would try to climb aboard, having the unshakable belief that this was an omnibus. More trouble for the footmen. In short, if the cycle remained motionless long enough, there was what the police like to call danger of an affray.

On occasion, it would finally become necessary for Lady Chattalot to emerge from behind a Chinese screen, where she'd been attempting to nap, and rebuke the crowd in her full accent. Nothing less would clear the street, but Lady Chattalot's absolute accent. The urchins would drop their brickbats, the costermongers doff their caps, the policeman salute smartly, and the drunken gentleman would stop trying to hand his fare to the footman, mumble an apology, and slink away.

But after each such halt, there'd be the problem



of getting started again. The costermongers would have to be pressed into service, along with rag-and-bone men, dustmen, and any other strong backs in sight, to push, push, push.

These police incidents deeply distressed her ladyship. Despite her own natural distaste for ostentation, she was obliged to send out servants with flags bearing the Chattalot crest, to warn other vehicles and to put an end to the police annoyance, the urchins and costers, and the drunkards. And this gave her to think. After all the curses and blows, the black eyes and frightened horses, the fatigued servants and bills to pay, she had to ask herself: was the game worth the candle? Indeed not. Her ladyship was beginning to be bored with these cycle excursions. A new idea had taken hold of her – hanging from a giant kite and gliding with the wind.

She had observed rosy-cheeked children flying kites in Hyde Park. Why should she not do the same, except for all the pointlessness running? The trick was to start from a high prominence with plenty of wind, as at Box Hill. She began to sketch a design for her new flying conveyance. She saw no point in being uncomfortable whilst aloft, yet at the same time she recognized the need for saving weight. Just a small horse-hair chesterfield then, and a light escritoire. The wine table would fit nicely in next to them, and perhaps a small billiard table, that is, if the gliding were level enough to permit games. A good-sized globe for navigation seemed sensible, plus a bath to counteract the effects of dirty air.

Before Lady Chattalot proceeded with her new plan, she thought it only fair to give cycling one last chance. It was that final journey which came near to causing a scandal throughout the realm.

One balmy spring morning, when the crocuses were pushing up like purple asparagus in the park, she ordered the contraption made ready for an after breakfast canter. She was eager to try out her latest addition, a small parlour piano. Within the hour, she descended from her room and made her way out the back door of the house to the mews. Her ladyship kept her head muffled in a scarf – simply entering into the mews was concession enough, she felt, without being seen there. Twelve grooms awaited. The two footmen handed her aboard and secured the Chinese screen, then took their stations at the pedals. Then the dozen grooms took up their positions and began to heave. And heave.

From behind the screen came piano encouragement in the form of the Eton Boating Song. The boys were certainly pull, pulling together, yet nothing was moving. This time the grand conveyance refused to budge an inch. One of the footmen got down and put his shoulder to a mahogany post, but it was no use.

A few servants from neighbouring houses had gathered in the mews to watch and laugh. One or two younger ones ventured catcalls and whistles.

The music stopped and Lady Emmeline peeped round the screen. "What's delaying us?" she asked in her accent. "And who is making that ungodly racket?"

"Can't budge it, your ladyship," panted one of the exhausted men.

She looked about and espied the loafers. "You men over there. Take your hands out of your pockets and come help here. Immediately."

The catcallers and whistlers stopped smiling and obeyed. With nearly twenty shoulders applied to it, the great vehicle groaned into motion like a frigate setting sail. "Stand clear! Stand clear!" cried the footmen, and manned their pedals. Her ladyship sat at the piano and played something from *The Mikado* to give them strength.

The footmen very soon found that strength was not required, for now the grand conveyance was accelerating without help as it trundled down the mews. Indeed, it was building up speed much too quickly. Their efforts to push back on the pedals had no retarding effect whatever.

"We're for it!" cried one of the footmen, as stables and cottages hurtled past on either side. "You jump for it, Joe. I'll stick with her." But Joe too clung fast. The magnificent machine hurtled out of the mews into the street at express-train speed, missing its turn and plunging towards the railings of the little square across the way.

A nurse pushing a perambulator heard the roar of iron wheels and the sounds of a Gilbert & Sullivan air. She was granted one last clear vision of the monster – the last thing she would see with two eyes was a tufted leather sofa rushing towards her like a mad bull. She and her pram were instantly slammed into the railings. Pinned there by several tons of furniture, the nurse lost consciousness. As she faded, she heard the music stop, and Lady Chattalot say, "What is the meaning of this? You there, nurse. What are you doing in our path? Oh, this is too bad."

**W**hen the dust settled, policemen and passers-by laboured to extricate the victims. The nurse had suffered internal injuries and lost an eye. The pram was totally demolished. By some miracle, its occupant, the five-month-old Viscount Vickers, was unhurt. He had apparently been thrown clear, landing on a soft couch aboard the grand cycle.

The incident caused a great deal of confusion, and attracted an even larger crowd than usual. Urchins gathered to jeer at one of the footmen, who lay in the street with a broken leg. Costermongers and butchers came to argue. More policemen kept turning up to ask what all this was. Manservants in shirtleeves appeared from various houses to help in the effort to shift the leviathan machine back, to free the nurse and her costly pram.

When Lady Chattalot emerged, she found this time her accent did not prevail. A policeman who, unaccountably, failed to recognize her attempted to place her under arrest for being drunk in charge of a pantechnicon.

Alas, all of this was witnessed by a reporter for a sensational newspaper. By feigning sympathy, that reporter managed to ferret out all of the most embarrassing details. He even followed her ladyship back aboard the cycle, where she found a drunken gentleman sitting on the sofa and trying to hand her his fare. He had already helped himself to a whisky and a cigar. "I say, this is a bit like," the drunken gent said. "Best damned omnibus I ever –"

Lady Chattalot was drawing breath to remonstrate when the vehicle lurched into motion, and she sprawled athwart the drunken gent. "Oh, I say!" he

said, trying to cuddle her, while the reporter scribbled furiously.

In the end, the incident cost Lady Chattalot forty guineas for an elegant French glass eye, another hundred for extensive repairs to the cycle, and the additional expense of setting the footman's tiresomely broken leg.

Far worse, however, was the newspaper scandal, with its strong hints of a mobile house of pleasure, or cigar divan. The persistent stories of "Lady Juggernaut's naughty car" finally led to a question in Parliament: "Is the Home Secretary aware that unsafe (and unwholesome) vehicles are abroad in the streets of London, and that one such vehicle has put at risk the life of a Viscount of the Realm?"

Mortified, Lord Chattalot communicated by telephone from his club – the Portmanteau, where he had been residing for the past fifteen years – his wishes to hear no more of this infernal chariot. Her ladyship, with a mixture of regret and relief, ordered the conveyance to be taken down to the country and stored in one of the granaries at the Chattalot country seat, Middlers.

Notice that Middlers, now the name of America's favourite bicycle manufacturer, should once have been merely the name of a house. The Middlers family connection is nowhere mentioned in the volume. It is possibly the name of a servant – a game-keeper, for example – who for some unknown transgression

was turned off the estate, travelled to America and founded the now-famous family. We might further speculate that the gamekeeper Middlers was, for some reason, obsessed with bicycles. The full story may never be known.

**John Sladek**, born 1937, is one of the science-fiction field's leading humorists. His satirical novels are *The Reproductive System* (1968), *The Muller-Fokker Effect* (1970), *Roderick, or The Education of a Young Machine* (1980), *Roderick at Random* (1983), *Tik-Tok* (1983) and *Bugs* (1989). He has also written several volumes of short stories and two detective novels, *Black Aura* (1974) and *Invisible Green* (1977). His pseudonymous and non-fictional work ranges from *The Castle and the Key* by "Cassandra Knye" (a romantic gothic, 1967), through *Arachne Rising: The Thirteenth Sign of the Zodiac* by "James Vogh" (a send-up of astrology, 1977), to *Using XyWrite II* (a computer-software manual, 1987). He lives in Minneapolis.

**Ian McDonald** (see story, pages 6-12), born 1960, has lived in Northern Ireland for most of his life but is currently contemplating a move to London. His previous stories for *Interzone* are "Listen" (issue 32) and "The Best and the Rest of James Joyce" (issue 58). His novels are *Desolation Road* (1988), *Out on Blue Six* (1989), *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (1991) and *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (1992).

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# Ansible Link

## David Langford



The 50th World SF Convention duly happened in Florida in the wake of that famous hurricane, but your intrepid reporter couldn't afford to go. (Sulk.) A crackly phone call came from my travelling representative Martin Hoare: "We've scored a British double...a seventh Hugo for you and guess what?" "Not one for Interzone?" "No, don't be silly. The Glasgow bid won the 1995 Worldcon!" So, just eight years after the universal chorus of "Never again" following the 1987 event in Brighton, the jamboree returns to this country. Try a stamped addressed envelope to 5 St Andrew's Road, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 2DY.

Those Hugo awards: novel *Burroway* by Lois McMaster Bujold (beating Orson Scott Card's heavily tipped Xenocide and Anne McCaffrey's *Another Bloody Dragon Book*, or whatever it was called), novella "Beggars in Spain" by Nancy Kress, novelette "Gold" by Isaac Asimov, short story "A Walk in the Sun" by Geoffrey Landis, nonfiction *The World of Charles Addams*, dramatic presentation *Terminator 2*, editor Gardner Dozois of Asimov's, artist Michael Whelan, "semiprozine" *Locus* (sorry, Mr Pringle), fanzine *Mimosa*, fan writer me, and fan artist Brad Foster.

### The Brains of Earth

Philip K. Dick's letters continue to appear under the editorship of Don Herron (Dashiell Hammett and Arthur Machen expert): six volumes are planned, with the second for 1985-6 out around now from Underwood-Miller (USA). Herron hopes for a corrected reprint of volume one.

Neil Gaiman's 1992 trip Down Under shed a perhaps unfair light on feminism at Australian sf conventions. The story goes that, turning to the sole woman in a small panel discussion, he politely observed: "You haven't said anything yet..." Whereupon anything the lady might have wished to say was drowned by a roar from the audience of: "That's because she's the token female on the panel!" - and Mr Gaiman, slightly nonplussed, said something along the lines of "Oh-I-didn't-realize-I'm-so-sorry-I-thought-you-might-have-wanted-to-speak." And so the panel continued...

Patrick Nielsen Hoyden, senior editor at Tor books, has put together

(with Mike Resnick) a new kind of alternate-world sf anthology: *Alternate Skiffy*, "a mind-bending collection of tales that ask what if H.P. Lovecraft had inherited the editorship of *Astounding*?"...and other eldritch speculations. Out next year in the USA.

Fritz Leiber suffered a second stroke in mid-August and as I write remains in hospital, with little chance that he will be able to return home. He is 81, and remarried earlier this year. (Since died - see Clute's obituary, page 4 - Ed.)

Terry Prochett tells me that the Arthur C. Clarke week in Minehead was fun despite a weird and amateurish atmosphere. The bit he didn't like was the "arrogant" film crew who were doing a commemorative video and demanded that speakers sign an "outrageous" disclaimer form (containing such phrases as "anywhere in the universe"). "I fell prey to the sin of evil satisfaction when they got in a snit and took down all their lights and left after I refused to sign..."

### Infinitely Improbable

*Tales of Publishing*. I wondered last issue why the Midnight Rose shared-world anthology collective (Temps, Weerde etc) was pondering a change of publishers despite unexpectedly high midlist sales: the answer is apparently that Penguin would like to enhance profits further by a one-third cut in authors' payments. Meanwhile NEL's Humphrey Price bewails the falling sales figures that have persuaded him not to take on another "Best of Interzone" collection...well, I don't suppose this page would have featured anyway.

The SF Encyclopaedia Soop Opera. There was vast relief in August when to the loudly expressed astonishment of the UK editors, tardy Peter Nicholls actually managed to finish his entries. Champagne corks popped and flying pigs were seen in the radiance of a blue moon, etc. By September the first 370,000 words of the new Encyclopaedia had been delivered on disk to Little, Brown (formerly Macdonald). The next glad news was that the fantastically complex system of coding for small capitals, boldface and italics which has bedevilled this project all along (it was insisted on by the pub-

lishers) doesn't actually make sense to the typesetting machines. Well, it's only 1.2 million words to overhaul, quipped optimistic copy-editor Paul Barnett.

R.I.P.\* ...long-time sf authors Reginald Bretnor and Alan E. Nourse both died this summer.

Definitely Too Good To Check: sf circles have been buzzing with the tale of a young graduate newly employed by Radio 4 who allegedly thought of a wonderful way to brighten it up - and on his own initiative wrote to Douglas Adams asking if he'd ever thought of adapting *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* for radio.

More Awards. The John W. Campbell award for best new writer (this year, Ted Chiang) is not to be confused with the Campbell Memorial Award for best novel (Bradley Denton's *Buddy Holly is Alive and Well on Ganymede*).

Ten Years Ago. A radio "Brain of Britain" contestant was asked what *Billion Year Spree* and *New Maps of Hell* had in common. The hesitant answer was: "Drug addiction?" No comment, absolutely no comment.

Pulphoûs (*The Only SF Magozine*) is a US parody publication which goes on a bit long but contains such joys as ads for *The Annotated Last Dangerous Visions Letters* ("follow the generations-long disputes; despair as editors, readers and writers' families beg for a look at stories they have only heard about through rumor!") and columns by luminaries like Awesome Scott Card and Algae Buttress: "I'm not going to review the latest volume of *Mory Boker Eddy Presents the Burnt-out Hooks of the Future*, since I am intimately involved with it, to the tune of many thousands of dollars. Rather, I am simply going to announce its publication, and allow you to visit your local Christian Science Reading Room to pick up a free copy." It's only fair to add that Algis Budrys - doubtless wearying of gags like this - has cut his links with the L. Ron Hubbard promoters, dropped his *Magazine of Fantasy and SF* reviewing, and moved to edit the new *Tomorrow Speculative Fiction* from (the real) Pulphouse Publishing. Submission address: PO Box 6038, Evanston, IL 60204, USA.

My First Fun Moil: Luke M. Treddinick asks urgently, "Does the column in *Interzone* mean that David Langford has sold out?" Gee, thanks.

# Zen and the Art of Never Saying Never Again

Stan Nicholls talks to Douglas Adams

**D**idn't Douglas Adams say he would never write another Hitch Hiker's book? "Absolutely. I said it after the first book, the second book, the third book and the fourth book."

So why return to the series with a fifth, *Mostly Harmless*? "I didn't want to do any more because it had completely dominated a number of years and I was sick of the sound of it. What made me think again was reading an interview with Paul McCartney in which he talked about the fact that on the last tour he did he was going to perform a lot of Beatles songs. He said, 'I think I'm allowed to do them now. Everybody else does.' It was him saying he recognized he'd had a sort of mental block about it that made me think, 'Why don't I do another Hitch Hiker's?' But I don't want to get stuck in the rut again, so this time I made sure I killed off all the characters."

It was more a case of regeneration and rekindling of interest in the eight years since *So Long*, and *Thanks for All the Fish* than a specific idea that inspired *Mostly Harmless*. Well, that isn't entirely true, because the starting point was a particular idea. But it got relegated.

"The idea I had that impelled me to write it was one that only then in fact sneaked in at the end," Adams explains. "It's inevitably the case that whatever idea impels you to write a novel turns out to appear in the book as an afterthought."

"We're all familiar with the plight of the child of immigrant parents who is caught between two cultures, one of which they grew up in, one of which is their parents' and they know nothing about. I was trying to imagine that in the context of somebody who was a product of Earth parents but who didn't know anything about the Earth. But as I say, that finally crept in as a minute thing at the end, even though it kicked off everything else."

Adams sees *Mostly Harmless* as quite a lot different than its predecessors. "It's more different than I expected. That's largely because it's an older person writing it, and in a way I think it's a more serious book. Perhaps not so different or so serious as *So Long*, and *Thanks for All the Fish* turned out to be, but unlike *Mostly Harmless* that

was something I basically didn't want to write. It was my contractual obligation book at the time."

He believes his work is better approached from the perspective of humour than science fiction. He enjoys sf, but there is a sense in which his choice of it as a vehicle for his ideas was pragmatic. This being the case, I remind him of actor Edmund Keen's last words - "Dying is easy. Comedy is hard." How hard is it for Adams?

"It's very, very hard. You have to be aware of precisely how things work in different contexts. Very often, people hear something that's funny in a conversation, then think that because it worked verbally it must be funny in print and are surprised when it isn't. So one has to become a sort of comedy engineer."

"A lot of comedy is surprise and defeating expectations, and you've first got to create a set of expectations which are themselves going to be enough to make people want to read them. Then you have to confound those expectations, and all you've got to do it with is a blank sheet of paper. You have to create something out of nothing. Which is craziness."

"You go to your desk at ten o'clock in the morning then letters come in, the phone rings, your software arrives and you've got to upgrade, whereupon your computer ceases to function. All this stuff you let in, because you're retreating from the blank screen."

We are talking about heavy duty avoidance here. "Oh, yes. That's one of the reasons I think I've become quite an expert on computers. In the past one would presumably have become a great expert on typewriters or pencils. I've become such an expert now that despite the fact I'm an Arts graduate Apple recently asked me if I'd go and work for their advanced technology group in America. That would be a wonderful piece of displacement!"

"When it comes to writing, I really drag the words out. Consequently you never quite know how to react when people say, 'That read as if it was easy to write.' The hardest work you do is in creating that illusion, of course. So you don't know whether to be pleased or frustrated when people say that."

**A**dams is candid about his reputation for finding deadlines difficult to hit. "I'm the absolute archetype of the sort of writer who does the last ninety percent of the work in the last ten percent of the time. That applied to *Mostly Harmless*, and in fact it's always been the case. It becomes a sort of zen problem, because there has to be a deadline that everybody believes, including myself. And having broken so many previous ones, you never quite believe in whatever the current one is. The zen-like problem is trying to see which is the real one."

This makes it sound as though his working methods consist of leaving everything until the last minute and then panicking. "No, I spend about a year in a state of panic. I do all sorts of outlines that instantly get abandoned because they don't work. But I'm determined to crack the schematics problem because I know that if I could work to a detailed plot I'd write better books."

"One of the problems I find, when your job is essentially to write a funny book, is that you may have devised something that works in dramatic terms or this, that and the other terms, but when you put down the first scene it isn't funny. Therefore you have to start twisting it around, putting new stuff in, and at the end you may have a funny scene but it's no longer relevant to the plot."

"What I'm hoping to do is edge further and further away from the necessity of being funny. You enjoy being funny more if you don't have the absolute requirement on you to be funny."

It must be difficult trying to move away from a genre you have had such success with. What would happen if he went to his publisher and said he wanted to do that? "Well, I think we'd certainly have a discussion about it. But I'm not about to write a western or a romance. On the other hand I could easily see myself drifting slightly, not so much into doing something radically different, as into a gradual change of emphasis."

"One of the things that has come to interest me more and more has to do with perspectives on who we are. I mean, this has always been there, and to begin with one does shifts in



perspective as a joke. You know, Arthur Dent's house gets demolished and then the whole Earth gets demolished and you suddenly see it another way. It's that sort of perspective shift that constantly fascinates me.

"We are at a very, very interesting point in our history, at all sorts of crossroads for the human race. If we're going to understand them and respond to them properly we need to make some of these perspective shifts, and it would be interesting to work out ways of telling stories which illustrate that. They might well be ironic in all kinds of ways, and funny where appropriate, but if you're no longer saying, 'My first job is to be funny,' then I might end up doing something that satisfies me slightly more."

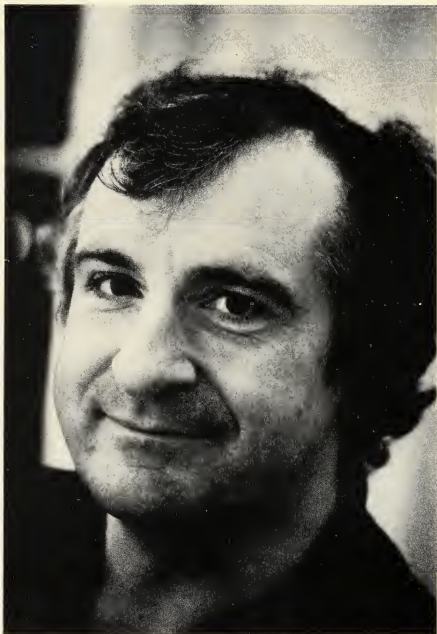
What this something turns out to be is not easy to nail down. "I would say somewhere between the mainstream and science fiction. I could almost say science fact novels, I don't know. There's another whole direction I might be moving in because something I'm very keen to do suddenly looks like it might become a reality and I'm getting slightly nervous about it. It's a major twelve-part television series on what we know about the universe."

In just twelve parts? "It's not going to seek, obviously, to be comprehensive. My aim is to give a very distinct point of view, and a new way of looking at what we think we know and what we take for granted. It's a documentary series, which I would write and present, and to paraphrase *Hitch Hiker's*, it will be about the universe in general and everything in it in particular.

"In the last two or three years I've been doing a lot of lecturing, mostly in the States, usually on ecology and computers, which overlap a great deal because they are both aspects of the idea of complex systems. I want to address the things we most regularly run across in life but which science as we have known it since Newton does not give us the appropriate tools to deal with. One of the radical changes computers have brought is that hitherto we've done science by taking things apart to see how they work and we now do science by putting things together to see how they work. Computers give us the ability to model very complex events and systems.

"Physics, as we study it at school, is to do with things in hermetically sealed environments, where you've very carefully honed away everything else in a situation. We've always looked for linear results in closed systems. Largely what computers enable us to do is start looking at all the stuff you and I happen to know occurs all around us the whole time. The sort of chaos, both with a small c and a capital C, that surrounds our lives.

"We now have the ability to effec-



Douglas Adams

tively evolve life forms within a computer. But when one looks for a way of defining life it's a very, very hard thing to do. What is alive and what isn't alive? OK, we say that we're alive. Do we say a colony of ants is alive? Do we say a colony of sponges is alive? It's very difficult to come up with a definition of life that's more precise than entities that compete with each other for replication and through natural selection. We can now start using computers to tell us extraordinary things about ourselves we simply didn't know. And an awful lot of questions we try hardest to answer, because they are the most bewildering and baffling, turn out to be simply emergent properties of complex life systems."

Some cosmologists and physicists state that their speculations in this area have led them into considering a

religious origin of life. Adams rejects this view. "Oh no, absolutely not. It's quite the reverse in my case. I am, I would say, a radical atheist. Having spent a lot of time studying evolution I have come to the conclusion that Darwinism is probably the single greatest discovery human beings have ever made. It's interesting that people don't seem to realize that. I think it is the most important theory about how we came to be what we are, and how the universe came to be, because you can extend Darwinian principles, as people are gradually beginning to do, outside the field of what we immediately think of as life.

"At the beginning of *Mostly Harmless* I have three principles, which don't particularly relate to the book other than I just wanted to put them in there. They are: 'Anything that happens, happens: 'Anything that, in happening,

causes something else to happen, causes something else to happen,' and 'Anything that, in happening, causes itself to happen again, happens again.' Everything can be reduced to this set of principles. That's Darwinian.

"The interesting thing about Darwinism is that it is very, very simple in the rules it proposes, and they are self-evidently correct. We've always kind of known this, but it's only since the advent of computers that we've started to be able to generate some kind of visceral sense of how powerful Darwinian selection is, and how it gives rise to the most complex phenomena. You have to sort of look at the world upside down to see it properly, though, because one of the things we have evolved into is entities that look for intention and purpose in everything, and as we look for intention and purpose we tend very easily to find it. We don't question the assumptions hard enough. In order truly to understand you have to strip those ideas of intention and purpose out. Once you do, the most astonishing, awesome structure remains. The search for meaning and purpose obscures that."

Adams was not always a non-believer, however. "Many years ago I was extremely religious. My parents belonged to a Christian community, which had quite a strong effect on my growing up, and all the way through school I took Christianity very seriously. The point at which the cracks began to appear was when I stopped in the street one day and listened to an evangelist preaching. I stood there for about twenty minutes, and after a while this horrible, cold, clammy feeling crept up my spine. I had to face the fact that this guy was talking complete nonsense. So the conversion process was started by a street-corner evangelist. Contemplation of the world as revealed by the process of evolution is far, far more awesome than a religious interpretation."

We fall to discussing why it should be that some people can look at evolution and accept it as awesome but understandable, while others look at it and say it's so awesome it must be the work of God. "That isn't an explanation," Adams contends. "It's just moving it a step aside. The moment you have to explain things in terms of a god you make it more difficult for yourself. Because how do you explain the god? That is much harder to explain in many ways than evolution."

"There's a kind of wonderful temporal chauvinism in religious explanations. The time scale on which things occur in the universe, from the cosmological down to the microscopic, is unimaginably vast. Because we happen to have a life-span of seventy revolutions of our planet around the sun we tend to think of everything in those terms. We think that what is

apparent to us is all there is to see. It's a sort of blindness."

The knowledge he is acquiring about these vast and complicated issues is something he would like to feature more strongly in his future work. "I hope so. Because when I first started writing *Hitch Hiker's* I didn't really need to know very much. You can have an awful lot of fun playing around with stuff when you don't know anything. Now I know an awful lot more."

**D**oes knowing more become any kind of hindrance when writing fiction? "In the sense that you have to find different ways of dealing with your subject matter, yes. I suppose the problem is that if there is a particular point you want to get across, or a particular perspective you want to introduce, then you don't have quite the same liberty just to freewheel wherever you want to go. You keep on worrying away at what you think the heart of the matter is."

"Very often that's a facet of fiction which can be rather frustrating: the demands of plot and story and the demands of the ideas you want to put across are pulling in different directions. I don't quite know what the resolution of that is. It might be that if I do go ahead and make this TV series it will give me a way of expressing the points I want to make. Then fiction can just be fun, if you like. I don't know how successful I would necessarily be at marrying fiction and the sort of didactic side of my life. How that works itself out is something I hope I'll be able to discover over the next year. But I've got one more novel I'm contracted to write before getting into the TV series."

"As to what that book will be, well, I've got several different notions juggling with each other at the moment. I'm trying to work out if it will be one book or two books. Or three books. I'm trying to find which threads come together. It might well be a *Dirk Gently* book. Or it might be yet a third series. I'm sitting here playing around with plot strands and seeing what emerges. If the ideas end up still being slightly fantastical it will probably be a *Dirk* novel. If they are less fantastical then I've got to come up with new characters, situations and so on. But I'd love to write another *Dirk* book because I really like that character."

"There are also lots of commercial considerations. If I write another *Dirk* book then that simply sits under the umbrella of the rights I've already sold for a movie that might or might not get made. It's under development at the moment."

"When somebody wanted to buy the rights to *Dirk Gently* I wasn't quite sure what to do. I haven't got time to get myself thoroughly immersed in that, and being half involved is the worst

of all. But in the end I made the decision to let this particular producer do what he wants with it, and I have to take a back seat and see what happens. It's a bit nerve-racking. It's also slightly strange to sit down and write a *Dirk* book not knowing what someone else is doing with the character."

The wariness partly stems from his experience with the TV adaptation of *Hitch Hiker's*. "I had a great deal of say in that, but the producer didn't have a great deal of listen."

"The series turned out OK, I suppose. I found it deeply frustrating, I must say, because it could have been something absolutely wonderful. I had a definite set of ideas about how to make it unlike anything that had been on television before. The producer wasn't interested in that. He kept saying, 'I don't really understand all this. I don't see why anybody finds it funny.' I was rather aggrieved and, to be honest, by the end of the first six episodes it became a bit of a stand-off. I didn't want to carry on doing it if we had the same producer and the BBC wouldn't change him. We agreed that we intended to do another series, but I kept delaying signing the contract or writing the scripts because I wanted to resolve this problem."

"It went further and further down the road until I eventually said, 'Look, if I can't have what I want I'm out of here.' So I went off and wrote another book. It's sad. It was a perfectly good television series, but the radio series was a really ground-breaking radio series, and it could have been a really ground-breaking television series."

"The graphics they used in the series were one of the things that made it worthwhile. The little company that had the contract to do it, who were really great people, were a delight. They were very bright and imaginative and creative and terribly enthusiastic. But one of the things they didn't have was a computer, so it was all hand animation."

**T**his seemed a good point to ask what became of the long-awaited *Hitch Hiker's* film. "As a matter of fact I came very close to buying the rights back myself. At that time there were all sorts of immediate possibilities and things one could do with them. It was the simplest possible negotiation with Hollywood lawyers, and being the simplest possible negotiation it took about a year, of course."

"Unfortunately by the end of that year the recession had come to full bite and the options for moving forward were no longer as strong as they had been. I was basically looking at remortgaging the house to buy them back without any absolute certainty of seeing the film go into production, so I backed out. At the moment there is no movie in view and the rights still

sit with the people who bought them."

This will come as a disappointment to Douglas Adams's army of devoted followers. He is extremely grateful for these fans, but I question whether his relationship to them may in any way echo a complaint voiced by stand-up comedians, who often tell you that a bane of their lives is being collared by strangers who insist on telling them old jokes. "To some extent, yes. It's a question of expectations, and you tend to bridle a lot at some of those expectations. I mean, people always ask for more Marvin, and I can't do Marvin as an obligation. In fact Marvin doesn't appear at all in *Mostly Harmless*. I had a couple of scenes in the back of my mind I could have done but they never turned out to be relevant. It would have been shoe-horning them in. Not that I haven't done quite a lot of shoe-horning in my time, but I didn't want Marvin to be a chore.

"I do find the whole thing quite tricky. The idea that there's a bit of the inside of your head that's somehow gone public and people can wander around in is something I've never got used to. It's like sitting here in the house and having a stranger walk in and say, 'I don't think much of that sofa.'

"It's one of the reasons I've never been close to science-fiction fandom. On the few occasions I accepted invitations to go to conventions I felt like such a goldfish in a bowl. I really couldn't deal with it. That may be a personality flaw, and I know I caused some resentment by not being more available, but I just feel very, very odd about it. I get very much the Groucho [Marx] thing of not wanting to belong to any club that would have me as a member.

"Normally speaking, one of the things writers have is a certain amount of anonymity. I was at the wedding party of a great friend of mine recently. He's also a writer and writes for a lot of people, and there was this most extraordinary gathering of very well-known faces there. It reminded me what you have to contend with if you're a really well-known face, if you're Lenny Henry, Stephen Fry, Griff Rhys-Jones or Clive Anderson, and just never being able to be private.

"I used to find that if I went to a science-fiction convention I'd be so aware of people's eyes on me I'd forget how to walk. I found that very hard to deal with, which is why I stopped going to them. As I say, I think people sometimes resented that I haven't been more available, but it's beyond me to do that. I can't handle it. Anyway, as far as I can see most science-fiction writers go to conventions to get laid, don't they?"

He also makes a distinction between his professional life here and his professional life in the States. "Here, I'm thought of almost exclusively as the

person who wrote *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and anything else I ever get asked to do relates to that. Whereas in America there seems to be a much more natural assumption that somebody who can do something like that well might actually be capable of a wide range of things. There's a more limited view over here. I couldn't imagine I'd ever get asked to go and work for a computer company in England, for instance.

"I think we suffer in this country from what Australians call the Tall Poppy Syndrome. The tall poppy is any head that sticks up above the rest. It gets lopped off. The Australians are a bit like that. I'm a great Australia-ophile, I love Australia, but if anybody becomes successful in a larger environment than just Australia they get very resentful about it."

But this hasn't happened to him, has it? "Well, it has in a way, and it's one thing in my career I get really cross about. What I mean is that quite often people have said to me, particularly when I was doing the *Dirk Gently* books, 'Aren't you essentially still doing the same stuff?' I remember one interview I did on breakfast television for the first *Dirk* novel, and the interviewer said in a rather peremptory way, 'This book is like all your other books, isn't it? It's just a lot of ideas.' I was stumped by that.

"Then there's the thing which, of all the stuff I've done, I'm proudest of, which was *Last Chance to See*. It was a book I really wanted to promote as much as I could, because it's a huge topic to talk about. The thing I don't like about doing promotion usually is that you have to sit there and whinge on about yourself. But here was a big topic I really wanted to talk about and I was expecting to do the normal round of press, TV and radio. But nobody was interested. They just said, 'It isn't what he normally does so we'll pass on this, thank you very much.' As a result the book didn't do very well.

"I had spent two years and £150,000 of my own money doing it. I thought it was the most important thing I'd ever done and I could not get anyone to pay any attention. A lot of people said it was the best thing I'd written. If they had said, 'Well, nice try, but it didn't really work,' then you could accept that. But when you know you've done something good and you simply cannot get the media to pay attention... And I know what will happen now I've done another *Hitch Hiker* book: people will say, 'Aren't you just doing the same thing again?'"

This kind of typecasting rankles? "It did specifically in relation to *Last Chance to See*. I felt I was coming up against unthinking habits. But the world is what the world is. There's no point in railing against it any more than there is in railing against the

weather. It doesn't stop one, of course!"

This makes me wonder whether I'll be back in his home in a few years time talking about another new *Hitch Hiker's* book. "I don't think so. I don't know. I suppose the only sensible answer to that is never say never again."

Douglas Adams: *Mostly Harmless*, Heinemann, hb. £12.99.

## FOR SALE

**The Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction** by David Pringle (with assistance from Ken Brown). Hardcover edition, Grafton, 1990. A guide to some 3,000 sf titles, described by the *Oxford Times* as "among the four or five most useful books published in this field in the last two decades." It sold quite well and there are just a few copies left. We are selling these to IZ readers at less than half the original price of £16.95 - £8 inc. p & p (£10 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

**Interzone: The 2nd Anthology.** Paperback edition, New English Library, 1988. Stories by J.G. Ballard, Gregory Benford, Thomas M. Disch, Garry Kilworth, Paul J. McAuley, Kim Newman, Rachel Pollack, John Shirley & Bruce Sterling, Brian Stableford, Ian Watson and others - fine tales which the *Times* described as having "the quality of going right to the edge of ideas which can chill as well as warm." It's now officially out of print, but we have obtained some remainder copies for resale to IZ readers at just over half the original cover price - £1.75 (including postage & packing; £2.75 overseas; \$5 USA).

**Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare.** A monograph by David Pringle, Borgo Press, 1979. Covers all Ballard's work from "The Violent Noon" in 1951 up to the eve of publication of *The Unlimited Dream Company* in 1979. Still in print in the USA but long hard to obtain in Britain. Now copies are available from Interzone at £3.50 each (including postage & packing; £4.50 overseas; this offer not available to USA).

For any or all of these items please send a cheque or postal order for the appropriate amount to: Interzone, 217 Preston Drive, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. You may also pay by Access (MasterCard) or Visa card; please send us your card-holder's name, address, card expiry date and signature.

# Engels Unaware

## Elizabeth Hand

"It's a pretty ritzy office," the agent at Kahn Temps warned Rebecca, staring pointedly at Rebecca's uneven hem where the faint glint of a staple hinted at what was holding the worn skirt together at the knees. "I don't know why they don't just hire a permanent receptionist. Don't want to pay for benefits, I guess. But it's your assignment if you want it."

"Thanks," squeaked Rebecca, promising herself that she'd pay off her credit-card bills and start from scratch, really save some money this time and clear her credit rating.

"Fine. You start Monday." The agent's glance slipped from the frayed skirt to a run that began just below Rebecca's knee and arrowed to the curled edge of her old loafer. Rebecca knew the look. She cleared her throat and smiled, tugging furtively at the loose pocket of nylon behind her knee as she fidgeted in her seat. The agent wrote the name and address of Lorimer Brothers on a little pink business card, then handed it to Rebecca.

"Thanks," said Rebecca, coughing as she stood and lined her left foot behind the right, so the agent wouldn't notice the broken heel curled like a blackened sliver of dried beef. "I have to run now. Shopping." She smiled brightly. When the agent turned to answer the phone she fled.

On Monday she didn't feel so good about the new skirt. It didn't actually go with last season's gauchito jacket, and her old pumps were the wrong colour: écriu when they really should have been toast. The skirt had cost her one hundred and seventeen dollars, even on sale at Glumball's; but sale items couldn't be returned, and besides she'd had to charge something or they were going to close out her account. Now she stood too long in the lobby of the vast corporate office building, squinting at her reflection in the black marble walls and wondering why she hadn't bought the moleskin cardigan. By the time she got to the 87th floor she was late.

"This is your station," barked a woman in a fire-engine red Italian suit. She pointed to a slab of polished grey marble surrounded by a low smoked glass wall, the whole thing facing the hallway; Rebecca's head suddenly felt very light. She rested her hand on the edge of the dark glass wall to steady herself. It was so cold, its edge so sharp that she gasped and snatched her hand away, checking her fingers for blood. The office manager pursed her lips and took a

tissue from her wallet, then wiped the offending glimmer of Rebecca's fingerprint from the glass.

"I assume you've worked the Magister telephone system before?" The office manager coughed discreetly, dropping the tissue into a steel cylinder. Rebecca followed her into the workstation and nodded, lying.

"But maybe you'd better go over it with me to make sure," she said, settling into an ergonomic chair shaped like a tiny velvet S. The office manager regarded her with wide surprised eyes, then shook her head.

"I've never actually used it. I'll see if I can send Victor out after he's got my coffee." She smoothed the narrow band of scarlet leather across the top of her thighs, shrugged and returned to her office.

It took Rebecca a week to learn the phone system. For the most part, her duties began and ended with answering the phone and screening visitors. Occasionally a secretary would hand her something to type. Then she'd get to use the time word processor, with its printer that hummed as it spat the neat pages onto her marble desktop. She could see through the smoked glass wall to the banks of elevator doors in the corridor, and straight across the wall to the glass elevator that slid up and down the outside of the building like a silvery waterspider on emerald cables.

Only one other office occupied this level, its door catty-corner to Rebecca's station. If she positioned herself just right she could see everyone who came and went there, too. Not that the other office had many clients; certainly not as many as the young and stylish firm of Lorimer Brothers.

"What do they do?" Rebecca finally got up the courage to ask one of the secretaries, after she'd stayed late the previous evening copying out a complex tiramisù recipe for her.

"Who's that?" The secretary scanned the recipe, tapping her fingernail against her lower lip so that it left a faint half-moon in her lipstick.

"That other office. The World Business Forum."

"Hmmm? Oh - them?" She tilted her chin towards the door and slid the recipe into her portfolio. "Nothing, actually. Just a bunch of retired businessmen. Dinosaurs who couldn't keep up with the times. They rent the office space and play 'corporation.' Kind of sad, really. Like all these old guys who used to be important and now they can't quit, even though



they're retired. No one ever really talks to any of them."

Rebecca talked to one of them. Every evening when she left the office she took the glass elevator downstairs, floating along the outside of the great steel and marble tower and watching the flickering spans of lights in the financial district, like an earthbound aurora. It was a languorous descent, and for this reason the brokers and analysts and accountants used the interior express elevators, whose doors barely hushed shut on the 87th floor before they gaped open upon the glossy lobby. So each night Rebecca rode down alone, imagining herself sole witness to the city's silent shimmering display.

Until the evening she met Mr Lancaster. Office talk had been of rain, although Rebecca never saw a window to check for herself. She dashed from her console into the corridor, wrapping a vinyl scarf around her head and wishing she'd bought an umbrella last week instead of charging those gila-lizard print gaiters at Frothingale's. At the end of the hallway the glass elevator glistened and shuddered in the rain. Rebecca tugged her scarf tight, shivering at the thought of seven blocks of storm before she reached the subway. And so, her head bowed and swathed in cerise vinyl, she didn't even see the old man rushing into the glass elevator until she smacked into him.

"Oh god, I'm sorry!" squealed Rebecca, unravelling her scarf to peer crestfallen at an elderly gentleman catching his breath beside her. "I didn't even see — no one ever rides this one — Gee, I'm sorry." She stood awkwardly, the vinyl scarf falling in crackling ribbons as the elevator door sighed shut.

"That's quite all right," the old man coughed, smoothing an immaculate fawn-coloured trenchcoat and drawing a large white handkerchief from a pocket to dab at his cheeks. He replaced the handkerchief and slid a pair of glasses from another pocket, placed them on his nose and regarded Rebecca thoughtfully. "Are you lost, my dear?"

Rebecca fumbled to stuff her scarf into her purse. "No — I, uh, I work here."

The man tilted his head to stare at her above the rims of his spectacles. "Here?" His tone was somewhat doubtful.

Rebecca flushed, fingering a hole where she'd lost a button on her coat. "A temp — I'm a temporary. A receptionist."

"Ah." He removed the glasses, nodding slightly, as though relieved. "Forgive my curiosity. We don't socialize much with our neighbours here. I didn't recognize you." And he smiled. "I am Hugh Lancaster, of the World Business Forum."

"Rebecca Strunk." Rebecca pumped his hand earnestly. "Of Kahn Temps Inc."

"Ah," Mr Lancaster repeated, absently this time, and he leaned forward to touch the elevator controls. "Lobby, Miss Strunk?"

"Yes, thanks." She let her breath out in a wheeze and tried to stand up straight. Rain battered the heavy glass walls as the elevator began to slip down the side of the building. Rebecca cleared her throat. "No one ever takes this one, you know. You're the only person I've ever seen in it besides me."

Mr Lancaster adjusted the fleece-lined collar of his trenchcoat and smiled. "I prefer my own company



Illustrations by Dan Barker

at the end of a busy day. As I imagine you must as well, Miss Strunk."

Rebecca nodded eagerly, delighted at being addressed as Miss Strunk. "Oh, yes, Mr Lancaster! It's such a nice view —" And she turned to press her cheek against the cold glass and stare out at the steel canyons awash with reflected light.

Mr Lancaster looked at her more closely for this unguarded moment, noting the broken heel and missing button, as well as the dangling slip that Rebecca herself had yet to discover. Then he took a step closer to the glass wall, nodding as he surveyed the shining frieze of scarlet and amber lights that wove through the sombre canyons below. "It is a lovely view," he agreed. "I often wonder why no one else travels this way to see it."

Rebecca shook her head. "They all say it's too slow," she murmured, rubbing her cheek to dispel the chill.

"A shame," remarked Mr Lancaster. "When I work into the evenings, I always ride down alone. But now I hope to occasionally have company." And he smiled gently as the elevator finally settled into the lobby, and waited for Rebecca to step out of the elevator before following her.

"Shall I hail you a cab?" he asked as they poised at the main entrance, among the gleaming crowds shaking raincoats and umbrellas onto the slick marble floor.

Rebecca shook her head hastily, wrapping the scarf around her neck. "Uh — no thanks, a — um — a friend is picking me up." She smiled brightly, then impulsively stuck out her hand. "Very nice to meet you, Mr Lancaster."

"Likewise, Miss Strunk," replied the old man, and his warm gloved hand shook her bare cold one. "Have a pleasant evening."

"Oh, I will," Rebecca assured him. "See you soon, Mr Lancaster." And she shoved her way through the crowds into the stormswept night.

**S**he did not see him soon, although she watched for him through the glass walls of the Lorimer Brothers office and even worked late in hopes of meeting him in the elevator again. Sometimes she saw other elderly men entering or leaving the World Business Forum office, all of them impeccably attired in expensive but unfashionable suits. None of them ever rode the glass elevator with her, and none of them greeted her as Miss Strunk.

One afternoon the copier in her office broke. A vast machine that took up most of a large room, it exhaled manuscripts and charts and reports along with the fumes of dry ink and expensive rag paper. When it died, gasping out a final stream of crumpled papers with a vindictive wheeze, panicky secretaries raced to pile papers atop Rebecca's desk.

"You can type, right?" the office manager demanded, reshuffling the stack in front of Rebecca so that her own work was on top.

Rebecca nodded, dazed. "But not all this — I can't possibly do fifteen copies of all this —"

"Then see if they've got a copier!" snapped the office manager, raking her nails across the sheaf of papers so that they left faint razor lines pointing in the direction of the office next door. "I've got a French-

wrap manicure scheduled for three and I need that report ASAP."

After the office manager stormed off Rebecca pulled a comb through her hair, wincing at the curls that snarled the plastic teeth. She shouldn't have tried the home perm. Now her hair was falling out, and the home cello-colour kit she'd charged at The Body Electric had stained her dry curls a jaundiced yellow. Hastily she ran a tube of *Oh! de Bris* lip emulsifier over her mouth, then gathered the stack of papers into her arms.

A very small brass plate identified the World Business Forum office. There was no doorbell; no internal security system intercom. Rebecca hesitated before rapping at the polished oaken door. After a moment she knocked again, and this time heard the creak of a chair being pushed across the floor, then the muted thud of footsteps.

"Yes?" An unfamiliar man's voice, quivering with age and suspicion.

"It's Rebecca, from next door," said Rebecca, coughing in embarrassment. "I — um, our copier broke — do you think I could use yours for just a minute please?"

"Hold on." Scrabbling and clinking; the whirr of bolts being drawn. Then a wizened face popped out. "May I help you?"

Rebecca stepped back, startled, and dropped several reports. "The copier," she repeated breathlessly, stooping to retrieve the papers and spilling more in the process. "Please — is Mr Lancaster in?"

The man swung the door inward, shaking his head. "No, he's not here today. I really don't see how I can help you —"

"It's just that they gave me all this —" Rebecca exclaimed helplessly, stumbling into the office after him. "Oh." She straightened and fell silent.

Dark oaken panelling covered high walls, glistening with lemon oil that scented the room faintly. Burgundy wing chairs, their leather veined and cracked with age, circled a long and intricately carved table. There was a small but ornate desk adorned with marble pen-holders and an ancient Royal Upright typewriter, black and gleaming and segmented like a scorpion. An elephant's-foot wastebasket filled with papers stood beside the desk.

"I think there might be some carbon paper," the man was saying brusquely as he marched to the desk. He began to pull open tiny drawers and rummage through pigeonholes adrift with pencils and pen-nibs. "We haven't hired a girl yet and I really don't know what's here —"

"Oh," Rebecca repeated as she clutched her papers to her chest, staring at the gilded arabesques of an Art Nouveau floor lamp, the bronze bookends shaped like inscrutable sphinxes. With some relief she noted a Magister phone deck in its case on the floor.

"Have you — are you very busy here?"

"Hmm. I know we ordered some," muttered the old man, glancing up as he clinked together several bottles of Indian ink. "Well, I guess not. No — er, not quite busy. This is a slow time of year for us." With a muffled groan he straightened and Rebecca grimaced sympathetically.

"I'm sorry — I didn't mean for you — thank you anyway."

The man nodded, rubbing his bald head and then

adjusting his cufflinks – which were, Rebecca noted with some amazement, of exquisitely wrought gold, and shaped like the heads of the sphinxes atop the bevelled-glass bookcase.

"I'm sorry I can't help you," he said gruffly, and with a slight nod motioned her towards the door. "But I must get back to my work now. Goodbye."

"Bye," chimed Rebecca, turning to wave. But the door had already clicked shut behind her, leaving only the musky fragrance of old leather and lemon oil in the chilly hallway.

**A**utumn shuddered into winter and still she remained at the firm. Meanwhile, Lorimer Brothers got involved in the successful buy-outs of a large avionics manufacturer and the Paddy O'Furniture chain of deluxe wicker ware. Senior staff members were rewarded with a sky trip to Vail. The office manager's secretary hired his own secretary. And more and more often Rebecca worked late, hand-addressing Christmas cards and typing up invitation lists for holiday gatherings that never included her.

One such evening found her there past nine o'clock. All day the Nuzak endlessly intoned market returns, futures information, industrial averages. Now it finally fell silent. From back offices wafted the faint ticking of sleepless analysts' fingers upon keyboards. She heard the fax keening to itself; the dry chatter of the telex machine chewing through reels of newsprint. After several hours Banzai Sushi-Togo delivered a plastic laminate tray of sashimi for the analysts and VPs. Rebecca smiled wanly as the leather-clad courier left, trailing the scent of wasabi and shaved bonito, and wished she'd brought an extra can of tuna fish. Once or twice the telephone rang and she took messages. She addressed more Christmas cards and read the latest issue of SEXFAX! She dozed.

And jerked awake, the edge of the console raking her wrist as she shook her head. Shouting. Certain she'd been caught sleeping again, she whirled and snagged her ankle in the stirrup of the ergonomic chair as she stumbled to her feet.

There was no one in the front office. Rebecca blinked and rubbed her eyes, wincing as the charcoal mascara left smears across her hand. Muffled thuds and moans from the back offices signalled that the analysts and VPs were taking a break from research and performing their plastimetrix exercises. That was all. Rebecca turned back to her console, relieved.

And heard it again. Deep chanting tones, masculine, wordless, throbbing with obscene portent. They echoed dully from the hallway, and with a start Rebecca realized the ominous voices came from the World Business Forum.

Football? she wondered, but it was Tuesday night. Warily she crept from her console.

That was when she saw the smoke curling from beneath the door of the World Business Forum office. For a long moment she just stared, watching the grey-green plumes rising from the aubergine carpet to form a heavy viscous curtain that severed her view of the corridor. Not until she actually smelled the smoke did she stir. An acrid yet cloying scent, redolent of funerals and the wrong sort of poster shops. With a muted shriek Rebecca dashed into the hallway.

"Mr Lancaster! Mr Lancaster! Are you okay?" she

choked, pounding on the door. Smoke slid down her throat like pungent oil. "Mr Lancaster!"

Abruptly the door swung open. Coughing, Rebecca wiped tears from her eyes to focus on the pinched shape of the frail old man she had seen last time.

"Yes?" he hissed, waving the smoke from his cheeks with an irritated flourish. "What is it now?"

Rebecca stared dumbfounded. Then came a small sound, like the turning of a key in a lock, and Mr Lancaster stepped from the haze, smiling gently.

"My dear Miss Strunk!" he murmured, and clapped his hand upon the other man's shoulder. "I beg your pardon, Edmund..."

Glowing, the first man stalked back into the murky office. Mr Lancaster produced a huge linen handkerchief and waved it, dispersing most of the smoke. "You must forgive us, Miss Strunk," he said. From a hidden pocket in his sombre grey suit he withdrew a tiny scissors and a cigar bound with silver filigree. "The proverbial gathering of the Old Boy Network in a smoke-filled room." With a wry smile he sheared the end from the cigar.

"Ohhh," Rebecca breathed in relief. "I was so afraid – I thought the smoke – I thought there was a fire."

Mr Lancaster replaced the scissors, pursing his lips. "How thoughtful of you to think of us," he said gently, placing one hand upon Rebecca's shoulder to steer her towards her own office. "Although – heaven forbid! – should there ever be a real fire, certainly you should think of your own safety, and call the fire department."

Crestfallen, Rebecca nodded and bit her lip. "I panicked," she admitted.

"Don't fret, Miss Strunk," continued Mr Lancaster, pausing in his office's doorway. "People panic over less important things all the time. Perhaps you are over-tired." He peered thoughtfully at her wide pale face and reddened eyes, pinched to slits by fatigue. "It's late. Why don't you go home now?"

"Oh, I will. Soon," sighed Rebecca, then smiled.

"Good night, Mr Lancaster."

**N**ext morning she overslept. She arrived thirty minutes late to discover a new mound of invitations to be addressed, printed on mock papyrus with the Lorimer Brothers hologram. There was also a memo revoking extra holiday leave for all non-essential personnel. Sighing, Rebecca settled at her console and began sifting through her morning's work.

She didn't even hear the Engels enter the office. A slight cough made her jump, dropping her alphabetized stack of cards. When she looked up they stood before her desk, stark and stunning as twin pillars of gold.

"Ah – can I help you?" Rebecca stammered, stumbling to her feet and ripping her stockings on the console.

The woman regarded her coldly. "We are here to see the Vice Presidents." Her crimson lips parted to reveal teeth so glitteringly white that Rebecca didn't even notice they were bared in a snarl rather than a smile. "Will you tell them we are here?"

"Uh – n-no one without an appointment," stuttered Rebecca. In the halogen lights the woman's hair

flamed in a brilliant golden nimbus around her face. Blinking, Rebecca turned to stare at the man beside her. He did not smile, but his azure eyes gazed at Rebecca caressingly. When he licked his lips she slid limply back into her chair.

"Tell them the Engels are here," he purred, glancing down at a scrawled note on her desk. "Rebecca."

"The Engels," she repeated, looking at them with a glazed expression.

"Myself and my sister," the man explained, flicking an atom of dust from the lapel of his caracal overcoat. "Our card." He whisked a tiny placard from an onyx case and placed it before her. Then he smiled and, taking his sister's arm, glanced conspiratorially at Rebecca.

"This way?" He raised an eyebrow rakishly, pointing to the back offices with a kid-gloved hand. "Rebecca?"

Rebecca nodded rapidly, still too dazed to speak, and watched the pair stride past. Their briefcases bumped together with a kiss of exotic leathers: distressed ostrich and moray eelskin. Rebecca wondered if the metal clasps and hinges glowing so lustrously could possibly be real gold and platinum.

"Gee," she whispered when they had disappeared, and only then realized her intercom was buzzing.

"This is Rebecca," she answered breathlessly, but the caller was already gone. When she looked up the office manager was marching down the hall towards her.

"Who the hell was that?" she demanded, snatching the business card but holding it so that Rebecca could read as well.

**Grædig & Avaratia Engel  
Futures Speculation**

"Oh," the office manager said knowingly. "Europeans." Then she glared at Rebecca. "But no one comes in without an appointment. I see I'll just have to do your job for you." She spun about, her chrome heel grinding into the carpet, and called back warningly, "Your six-month review is coming soon, Rebecca." Then she stalked into the back office.

Rebecca waited anxiously for the office manager to return, Engels in tow. An hour passed; nothing. When she tried to patch phone calls to the VPs their secretaries flashed DO NOT DISTURB signals back to Rebecca's console. Several times admiring laughter echoed from the offices, and once a brittle burst of applause startled Rebecca as she hunched over her mound of invitations.

At lunchtime she finally heard doors opening in the back, and after a few minutes the Engels entered the reception area once more — this time surrounded by excited VPs and analysts. The office manager trailed several feet behind them, her yearning gaze fixed upon Grædig Engel's caracal topcoat.

"Will you please make a luncheon reservation for thirteen at Piazzi Inferno?" a VP commanded Rebecca, then turned to pump Avaratia Engel's hand.

"This is an extraordinary piece of work," the VP beamed, waving a portfolio bound in glossy black sharkskin. "And I just can't tell you how fortuitous it is that you approached us first, Ms Engel —"

"I believe you mean fortunate," Grædig Engel corrected him, deflecting a yawn with his long pale fingers. "And I regret that my sister and I will be

unable to join you for lunch —"

"But you must!" cried another Vice President, covetously eyeing Grædig Engel's attaché case. "They serve the most superb blowfish rilletes!"

Avaratia wrinkled her nose in distaste, stooping to whisk a chamois glove across the instep of one gaval boot. "I'm afraid we have another appointment this afternoon," she said, tossing her mane of golden hair. "Perhaps another time."

The Vice President looked crushed. Smiling, Avaratia took her brother's arm. Rebecca stared entranced at the curve of her neck, the warm reflection cast upon her throat by the heavy gold chain nestling there. For a moment the two stood poised there, Avaratia gazing out into the corridor, Grædig beside her a lupine shadow hidden within the folds of his caracal coat, cashmere scarf coiled about his neck. Then, with slight bows to the staff crowding the reception area, the Engels turned and strode down the hall.

A breathless instant, so still that Rebecca could hear the creak of Avaratia's boots, the rustle of her brother's coat. Then —

"Did you see his ring?"

"— guarantees return at 300% if we strike this week!"

"— dyed, has to be —"

"— calling Chicago right now before this gets loose —"

"— would die for that suit, just die for it!"

The office manager swept from the group and leaned over the console, her face flushed. "Not a word!" she hissed to Rebecca. "I'll be back by three —"

Everyone took a long lunch that afternoon, except for Rebecca. They began straggling back into the office after four, the VPs rosy-cheeked from their lunch at Piazzi Inferno, the brokers and analysts laden with shopping bags and hatboxes, hand-marbled Venetian pencil-cases and gilt panniers of chocolate-glazed nasturtium blossoms.

It was too much for her. Rebecca nearly tripped as she ran out of the office at five and raced into the first express elevator that stopped on her floor.

She arrived home hours later, after charging a nutria-rimmed faux Chanel suit and a three-hundred-dollar silk moiré evening burnoose from Bedouin Outfitters. Among the stack of bills at the door of her efficiency was a disconnect notice from the telephone company. Rebecca burst into tears.

**I**n the weeks following, the office telephone wailed nonstop. Rebecca's ears rang with its shrieks long after she left. Every evening the entire staff worked until midnight, feverishly following recommendations the Engels phoned almost hourly. The *Wall Street Journal* did a front-page piece on the firm. Lorimer Brothers had a second phone system installed to handle all the new client calls.

After the Engels' next visit the VPs flew to Val d'Isère and the Pyrenees for a weekend of skiing. Three of the female analysts threw political correctness to the winds and bought full-length lynx-belly coats and sashayed into work on Monday morning, giggling like parochial schoolgirls skipping Mass. The office manager began scheduling crushed-pearl defoliating body scrubs during her lunch hours. Even Rebecca found herself visiting The Body Electric for placenta hair-wraps and an electrolytic platinum



rinse that left her with chemical burns over most of her scalp.

Lorimer Brothers' clients began to do business with the Engels as well. Rebecca screened referrals every day, and once spoke to a television reporter regarding the siblings' cyclonic influence upon the street. She even saw the Engels leaving the World Business Forum early one morning, Avaratia and Grædig shaking hands with Mr Lancaster in the doorway.

As Christmas grew nearer Rebecca guiltily surveyed the heaps of unworn new clothes beside her futon, the designer bath linens and vicuna napkins still in their original packing. She swore not to charge another thing before she started her Christmas shopping, and wondered if her grandmother would enjoy the Valencia oranges poached in Armagnac she'd ordered for herself from Rabelaisian Delights. Each evening she spent in darkness now, since they had cut off her electricity. But the efficiency looked nice lit by hand-dipped beeswax candles. And she didn't feel so bad when she saw the collection notices that had begun to arrive at Lorimer Brothers for various staff members.

A week before Christmas it snowed. Rebecca slogged to work, ruining her new silk spring-weight trenchcoat and wondering again why she hadn't bought an umbrella, or maybe a down parka. Or warm boots, or gloves. In the glittering lobby she threaded her way through the crowd to the glass elevator. It had been weeks since she'd taken it; but she wanted to see the snow from above. When the door opened she laughed, delighted.

"Mr Lancaster!"

The old man stepped gingerly into the lobby, staring at her puzzled.

"Miss Strunk!" he exclaimed, drawing back a little. "I didn't recognize you."

"It's my hair," Rebecca said ruefully. "It fell out after the last conditioning treatment."

Mr Lancaster nodded sympathetically, then peered at her more closely. "Something else though, too," he murmured, and shook his head knowingly. "Ah, well, it's a busy season, and we all have lots to do before the big day." He smiled, tipping his hat. "I hope to see you before the holidays, Miss Strunk. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mr Lancaster." Waving, she stepped backwards into the elevator, catching a heel in the door and tearing it from her new mock-ocelot pumps.

The office manager sat rigidly at Rebecca's console when she arrived. "Chicago's just notified us of a major loss on the Skam account," she said curtly. "I've been ordered to start making staff cutbacks. Tomorrow will be your last day."

"But—" stammered Rebecca, clutching her broken heel as she dripped on the aubergine carpet.

"Sorry. I called your agency. They said contact them after New Year's for possible new assignments."

"Possible!" exclaimed Rebecca.

"I haven't got time for this now," the office manager shrilled. "Things are crazy enough this morning—" And she stormed into the back offices.

Rebecca stared after her in shock, then through teary eyes glanced at her empty desk. No messages. No assignments. Someone had switched off the Nuzak. Even the phones were oddly silent. And then—

"Get me Sheared Young & Lamb!" a voice boomed



from her intercom. "Now!"

Rebecca jumped, then placed the call. Afterwards she leaned back, curious. From the back offices drifted strained whispers. An analyst fled through the reception area in tears. Suddenly the Nuzak barked back on —

"London Exchange plummeting to oh point nine seven four —"

And then the intercom started buzzing.

"I want Avaratia Engel —"

"Get me Grædig!"

"The Engels!"

At the Engels' number an answering machine played the opening notes of Pachelbel's Canon in D before requesting a message. After Rebecca had called several times she could no longer get through. Their line remained busy for the rest of the morning.

She started taking messages for the Vice Presidents and analysts and brokers. "They're unavailable," Rebecca told anxious callers until she was hoarse. Two more analysts fled the office, one of them carrying a large box from which dangled computer cables. A hysterical VP ordered Rebecca to phone his ex-wife, burst into tears and hung up before she could place the call.

"New York plummeting to a record oh oh three seven oh six oh points —" the Nuzak droned.

"Cancel my one-thirty at L'Ordure," the Office Manager ordered Rebecca over the intercom.

Rebecca started getting nervous.

She hung up on a man from the Tokyo Times and cancelled seventeen lunches and one American Express Titanium Account. She was thinking about leaving early when through the door staggered a young woman in a dishevelled sueded-silk suit.

"I want to see my broker," she commanded Rebecca, gripping the console's edge so tightly that blood seamed the cracks between her fingers.

"I'm sorry, he's unavailable right now," Rebecca gulped.

"He recommended the Engels to me. I want to see him now," the woman repeated, her palms streaking the glass with crimson.

"I'm sorry, no one can see you right now. You can leave a business card with me and I'll be happy to —" Rebecca started, when the woman yanked a Blush Micron Uzi from her pocket and pointed it at the ceiling.

"Here's my business card!" she shrieked. Glass shattered as she emptied a cartridge and ran towards the back offices. Rebecca fainted.

But came to a moment later when the office manager stumbled past, blood staining her mango lambs-wool coatdress a sullen purple.

"No one without an appointment," she gasped, and staggered into the hallway.

Rebecca raised herself to her knees, then quickly ducked beneath the console as a tattoo of bullets shuddered through the walls. Muffled screams from the back offices; an answering volley of gunfire. She heard a soft spurt of sound, like a bulb blowing. Then a louder explosion shook the suite. Glancing up she saw smoke trailing from beneath the keys of her tiny word processor. A moment later it burst into flames.

Rebecca lurched to her feet, heedless of the shrieks and thuds raging behind her. Smoke seeped into the reception area. Gaggling she fumbled for the telephone, punched in the emergency code and listened: a recording. Several figures reeled past her, coughing and weeping. Silently a VP settled on the sofa in the reception area, staring bemused at a small perfect hole in her thigh before stretching out as though to nap. Rebecca watched, frozen. Not until a fleeing analyst knocked against her as he raced for the door did she stir.

Behind her flames tore through the office, their roar nearly drowning the wail of smoke detectors and the clack of circuit breakers. The halogen lights guttered and went out. Screams rent the fire-lit rooms, and Rebecca fled blindly towards the door, choking as she stepped over bodies and burning heaps of paper.

In the corridor emergency lights flickered hellishly through the haze. A recorded message urged workers to be calm and use the fire stairs. Rebecca huddled against the wall, wiping her streaming eyes as she vainly tried to locate the stairwell. Knots of people clawed past her, moaning as they stumbled in front of the express elevators. Pale fingers stabbed at the elevator buttons. A door opened; inside she glimpsed a twisted mass of bodies gasping and screaming as they fled the upper stories. Then the doors slid shut and the elevator plunged down once more. Sobbing, Rebecca wrenched her eyes away.

At the end of the hallway glowed the glass elevator, its empty crystal booth spangled with reflected flames. Rebecca floundered towards it, inching past the crowd still futilely pounding at the express elevator doors. Someone kicked her to the floor. Rebecca crept the rest of the way, breathing through her sleeve. The carpet scorched her knees; her stockings melted in fiery tatters about her legs. Chemical fumes mingled with the smells of charred wood and hot steel. With a gasp she stood, flung herself against the glass door and pounded the button with her fist. With a soft chime the door slid open and Rebecca staggered into the tiny chamber. As the door shut behind her she glimpsed livid faces pressed against the steaming glass, mouths twisted and gasping soundlessly. Crying, Rebecca stabbed buttons over and over and over, until slowly the elevator began to descend. Then she leaned exhausted against the wall and stared spellbound at the scene outside.

Flames engulfed the financial district. From steel towers erupted sheets of gold as entire stories blazed like immense glass furnaces. Rebecca covered her ears against their gleeful roar, but she could not look away. She cowered against the wall, watching in horror as she passed flaming windows where black figures seethed behind molten glass, fighting to break through. Until the glass elevator itself trembled as one window exploded, and shrieking Rebecca covered her eyes to blot out the brilliant parhelion that sent scattered sparks and burning shadows plummeting to the street below.

When she looked up again the elevator had stalled. Trembling she reached for the control panel, but with a cry snatched her hand back: the metal buttons were too hot to touch. Whispering she turned back to the glass wall. And saw them.

Silhouetted in a great arched window, side by side they stood and watched the inferno all around them. As she stared transfixed, Rebecca could see their clothes burning away in glittering ribbons of gold and black, but still they waited, unmoving, wreathed in flames until it seemed that vast burning wings sprang from their shoulders and fanned the glowing air.

Then one of them stirred. Very slowly she turned her head, as if seeking a small sound, her unblinking gaze sweeping across broken windows and shattered stone until it struck the small glass cell. And pinned Rebecca there, so that she dropped to her knees, whining softly in her throat as she read the names written across their brows in streaming letters –

*Avaritia and Grædig.*

*Greed and Avarice.*

Crying out, Rebecca had started to her feet when with a groan of emerald cables the elevator shuddered and dropped once more. She fell back against the wall. When she turned and desperately sought them again, the shining figures were gone.

With a grating clang the elevator stopped. The inner doors remained shut, but the outer set chimed and opened smoothly onto the building's courtyard. Freezing wind slashed through Rebecca's thin blouse as she stumbled onto the sidewalk.

Everywhere the knell of sirens rent the air. Black-helmeted figures raced through the street from hydrant to hydrant, and spumes of water froze as they dragged huge coils behind them. Ambulances and police cars choked the alleys. In a daze Rebecca wandered along the kerb, heedless of slush soaking her burned legs.

At the corner she stopped, leaned against a broken traffic light that blinked madly from green to red. Cold numbed her fingers, and she drew her shaking hands to her face to warm them. A dark and narrow side street stretched beside her. As she stood trying to catch her breath, she saw twin headlights piercing the gloom. They grew nearer, and Rebecca stared dully as a long dove-grey limousine pulled up to her corner. Its smoky black window reflected her face, scorched raw and blackened with soot. Very slowly the window slid down.

"Miss Strunk!" a gentle voice exclaimed, soft with concern. Trembling, Rebecca stepped towards the car. Through the open window she glimpsed two figures, tall and golden-haired, clad in thick furs. They were smiling and toasting each other with long-stemmed crystal flutes. But next to the window sat another figure, smaller, white-haired, and his warm hands enveloped hers as he drew her to the opening door.

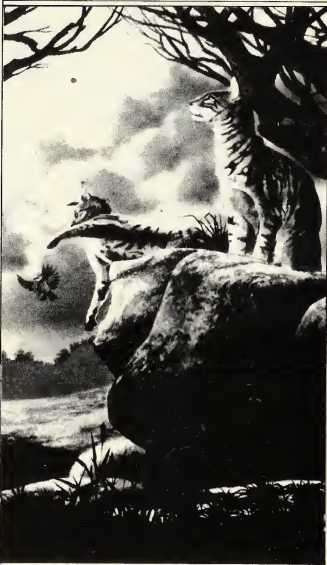
"My dear Miss Strunk," he murmured as he drew her in and the door hissed shut behind her. "Would you like a new job?"

---

**Elizabeth Hand**, who lives in rural Maine, has written three novels – *Winterlong* (1990), *Aestival Tide* (1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 64) and *The Eve of Saint Nynax* (forthcoming). Her stylish short fiction has been published in most of the leading science-fiction markets, including *Interzone*: "The Bacchae" appeared in our issue 49 and succeeded in outraging several readers.

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# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

**T**hank you very much; thank you. Okay, welcome to the seminar. I see a few familiar faces from my weekends on *How to Script Campy Werewolf Westerns*, *Using Inexperienced Foreign Coproducers to Finance Titles Like Rock n' Roll Columbus*, and *Shoot your Own Slumber Party Porno/Slasher Z-Pic for Less Than the Price of the Film Stock* (good to see you back for more, Hans-Jürgen). But today we're going for the big one. Today we're going to look at *Totally-Targeted Concept-Driven High School Fantasy Comedies*. Step by step, we'll see how these hilarious and ever-youthful celebrations of all that's "chillin'" can be built up from ordinary household waste products, and we'll check out what we can learn from two current models, *California Man* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, about the life-positive skills of making tomorrow's citizens laugh, aspire, and feel good about spending their allowance. I guess you don't need me to tell you why this stuff is important. Remember that those and these alone are the movies that address the lives of the actual core market audience: crazy, irrepressible, undiscriminating teenagers across the world who are either already high school seniors in southern California or would give all the unused areas of their cerebral cortex to be one. So let's give those teens what we know they want.

And that brings us to rule one. *Determine your audience*. Are you going for a "dude" market or a "dude/babe" market? Haha, no, there are no other options, unless maybe suicide. See, *Buffy* is a dude/babe picture, like *Heathers* say: it has a strong girl lead with five credited stunt doubles so she can do jaw kicks and martial gymnastics, but she still gets to shop, hang out, model neat frocks, and ride off at the end on the back of a bike with the heartthrob out of 90210 as dressed by Travis Bickle. So the girls like her because she reconciles radical feminism with radical femininity and slips in a joke or two about menstrual cramps, but the guys like her too because she's foxy and violent and changes mid-picture from designer girlie wear to big-check shirts, cutoff denim shorts, and black DMs. No, trust me, this stuff gets them really excited;

it shows deep down she's a male too. "Life's a bitch," her man tells her, "and you're the guy." By contrast, *California Man* is a strict dude picture, like *Bill & Ted* or *Wayne's World*. You have two geeky guys who bond a lot to make up for the fact they have no actual friends, who demonstrate their secret coolness by yacking in a hilarious private argot, and whose construction of sexual difference centres on the vital contemporary

concept of the babe – vacuum-filled sex dolls as inaccessible to human understanding as they are to the heroes' pathetically questing hormones.

Because rule two is *Satisfy the needs*. It's vital to grasp what this audience actually wants: popularity without conformity, romance without embarrassment, a sense of purpose and value in a life tailored to exclude it,



Kristy Swanson & Luke Perry in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*



and above all an instant universal miracle fix to all messy teenage social and emotional problems. In *Buffy*, this comes from discovering you're the chosen one and have all sorts of keen superpowers for catching knives out of the air and whamming wooden stakes through ribcages with one bare hand. In *California Man*, it's finding the best friend you've always dreamed of, an uninhibited total individual with virulently contagious charisma who'll ingratiate you with all the snooty cliques, by digging one up frozen and ready-to-use out of your lawn.

But remember, these kids have no experience of anything except school and movies. Don't ever commit the cardinal slip of suggesting there might be a reality outside these. Remember *Back to the Future* or *Bill & Ted*: if your film has to acknowledge the existence of history, say, be reassuring about it. If *Buffy* has to regress in dreams to a thousand lifetimes battling the undead and experiencing chemistry with Rutger Hauer, don't get too taxing about places and dates; just have Kristy Swanson flounce around in bilious sepia, bad blouses, and preposterous wigs under a caption "Europe: The Middle Ages." If *California Man* (as the only-slightly-funnier "Encino Man" has been redubbed for the overseas market) is supposed to be a prehistoric fish out of water, make sure (i) you spell difficult words like "Cro-Magnon" on the board at the beginning of the picture; (ii) subject is inexplicably west-European Caucasian, with gratifying lack of disgusting body ornament, amusing penis sheaths, or indeed any apparent cultural baggage whatever; (iii) his assimilation to Valley teen lifestyle comes as naturally and instinctively as driving on two wheels and the enjoyment of rock'n'roll. It'll further ease acceptance if you give him a cute name ("We've got the missing link standing in my bedroom. I know - we'll call him Link!") and differentiate prehistoric persons carefully from rival ethnic categories such as subcontinental Asians (humourless foodmart owners who refuse to let you "weaz the juice"), Chinese Americans (hopeless geeks: all members of school computer club), Latinos (hang out all day in tequila bars in bad area of town), Baltics (savage, remote, incapable of speech), Afro-Americans (never seen), and women (see "babes," above).

Okay, by now you're ready to thrash out a plot. I guess you all remember where Aristotle wrote how all movies have three acts: the first act, the second act, and the, anyone, yes? Very good. And how the end of the first act is where your hero makes his commitment, and the end of the second is where he reaffirms it after nearly quitting, and the end of the third is where he blows up a building, tosses the bad



Brandon Fraser & Wanda Acuna in 'California Man'

guy into a furnace, and goes off with the girl in elevated longshot? Well, in your high school movie this boils down to just four things. There's I Can't Believe..., the Party Mix, It's Just the Way It's Gotta Be, and the Senior Prom, and if those are in place pretty much everything in between takes care of itself. Let's check them through, shall we?

I Can't Believe... is the scene where you summarize your setup to the audience and invite them to marvel at how zany and extreme the premise is. Here's *Buffy*: "I can't believe I'm doing this. I can't believe I'm with a strange man in a graveyard on school night." Over to you, *Californio Mon*: "I can't believe you told my parents he's from Estonio." Then the Party Mix is the sequence soon after where our heroes are seen in a montage of dialogueless vignettes edited together to whatever soundtrack number you've paid the most for the rights to, all illustrating the swift and effortless advance of the plot once the Can't Believe hurdles have been overcome. Vital to get this one in, but beware: include two of these and it may look like you're short on real storyline! (*Californio Mon* boldly has three.) Moving along. It's Just the Way It's Gotta Be is the heart-warming emotional scene you let the actors do at around sixty-five minutes, where they pretend to get tired of all this high-concept horsing around and flirt briefly but tearfully with the idea of giving it up for a quiet life, which

they'll spend putting into practice the new wisdom and maturity that's come from hanging out with prehistoric pop-sicle people or driving guitar necks through the hearts of ravening undead bloodbeasts. And the Senior Prom, just like in reality, is where all life converges and is remade, where romantic pairings, all outstanding pecking-order grievances, and the future course of everyone's adult development all get settled on a big dancefloor with a live sound system and the whole school watching who comes out king and queen. *Buffy* actually substitutes a "Hug the World" environmental awareness dance for the senior prom proper, but that's just another sign of how daring and out-there this unafraid envelope-pusher of a movie is.

We're nearly there, but there's just a couple of further ingredients to flavour and colour the mix. Now more than ever, it's vital to pepper your dialogue with ribtickling up-to-the-nanosecond teen idioms like "heinous," "puh-leese," and "I wouldn't piss on your gums if your teeth were on fire." Remember you're up against Wayne & Garth, Bill & Ted, Heather & Veronica here, and the more there is of this stuff the faster it dates. So don't be afraid to learn from the example of *California Man* and cast a much-loved MTV presenter you've never heard of in the sidebar role, solely because of his copyright-protected line in amusing abstract nouns in "-ago." If you find

And finally and above all, get it right or die. There's nothing as sad as a teen movie that looks old. You've probably noticed that for all its dedication to the rules *California Man* is a tired, badly-written and charmlessly executed plot that would never have got within intercept range of a UK release but for its very distant resemblance to a couple of good and successful party-

(Nick Lowe)

Wendy Bradley has been ill. We hope she will return to her television and book reviewing soon – Editor.

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# Jurassic and the Great Tree

## Keith Brooke

Outside, it is like any other spaceport, any other planet. The sky is a high grey, touched with saffron, the surrounding hills ragged and tinged with the green of vegetation. The air is cool but despite this it is good to be free of the cloying atmosphere of the lander. I assume it must also feel as good to Rafe and Cezarro, but just now they are quiet, and I feel for a moment that the body is mine.

A two-tiered bus is skimming towards the 'port, along a narrow road which leads back to the city of Lupert-Grijns; around us our fellow passengers start an uncoordinated drift away from the lander. Lupert-Grijns is Pavonis Minor's main population centre, situated 18 degrees north where the equatorial land-mass thrusts out like Hokusai's wave, sloughing off a spray of islands along its course. It is a city approaching its 150th year, founded by the second influx of settlers; the first immigrants, landing farther to the south, had been less successful, the survivors patchily distributed and rapidly reverting to a savage barbarism. It is the descendants of this first colonization attempt that we have come to observe. They call themselves the Burul'chasi and they live in the depths of the equatorial jungle. They have successfully resisted intrusion into their territories for many years, yet now they want us to come, now they want us to see. "Only one man," they said, through their intermediary. "Only one man may come." And so we three are here, riding in the body of one.

A Pavonian emerges from the settling bus and comes across, smiling ingratiatingly. He is a head shorter than us, with shaggy hair and a patchy, adolescent beard. I can sense that both Cezarro and Rafe dislike him immediately. I remain neutral.

The man speaks and his words take a strange form, but still I understand. Language is a shared neural centre and Pavonian is Rafe's – and therefore Cezarro's and my – native tongue. "Welcome, Jurassic" – the name belongs to our current employer; we have no legal status, no single name – "I am Silas Breir, representative of the Lupert-Grijns Select. I am to be your guide."

A city councillor, although his youthful and shabby appearance conforms with none of the usual stereotypes. That one so young could attain such office implies either an unusual resourcefulness or, perhaps, that the Select does not come high on the Pavonian political hierarchy.

We follow Breir onto the bus and indulge in the polite inconsequences that form the basis of social introduction almost everywhere, according to Cezarro, our ethnologist and social interpreter. Cezarro is full of insights and penetrative analysis and he is the most willing of us all to share his wisdom. He attributes this to his Capellan upbringing, although it is possible that he only uses this explanation as a means to remind us of his aristocratic background.

But he rarely goes much further: for each of us our biographies are sketchy in much of the detail – in squeezing three personae into a single cranium a degree of editing takes place and one is left only with the psychologic forms which underpin one's essence, one's identity. Each of us is a me without the specifics. We have both mother and father, but they have no faces, no names (except for Cezarro, as the family name carries such psychological significance for him); they merge into our mental landscape, our psychoforms.

More recent details are there: my technical command of the skills of reportage is comprehensive, my knowledge of human history is both broad and detailed. I even have specific memories from assignments I have undertaken in my other self, my whole self – riding with the resource adventurers of Umbriel and Miranda, uncovering the human-anthrocin chimera experiments on Tau Ceti IV, tagging the Martian cyborg gangs. Somewhere, that me is alive and utterly discrete, an individual living off the proceeds of selling his talents in this way. Yet here, on Sigma Pavonis Minor, I am still me, if somewhat less so.

Cezarro disputes my view of our condition. He argues that we have no self, no set of selves: we are mere analogues, filling a shared body. We are here for a task – to observe the Burul'chasi, the descendants of the first colonists, and to file our reports with both our employer and our contractee in Lupert-Grijns. Afterwards we will be re-assigned and this body will be destroyed. We are a tool of Jurassic Informatic, no more. Cezarro enjoys these debates; he immerses himself and revels in attempting to undermine my self-belief, accusing me of diluting my professionalism with pop-philosophy.

And all the while Rafe sits back, remote. For practical reasons, we inhabit one specially developed body, one control-grown brain, yet we remain discrete; no

more intimate, in many ways, than a man and his marriage partner. Consequently, my knowledge of Rafe is limited: I know that he comes from a pastoral family on the northern fringe of the jungle, that he professes distaste for the Pavonian lifestyle; yet here he is – or here is his analogue – returning, his nervous enthusiasm so strong that it breaks the bounds of our mental blockades, giving our shared body an adrenal high.

Within minutes, we are at the edge of Lupert-Grijns, and Breir informs us that we are to spend the night in the city. “What else?” says Cezarro. It would be foolish to set out into the jungle at this hour.

All eight of Pavonis Minor’s hotels are to be found around the commercial and administrative centre of Lupert-Grijns; five of them have been constructed or converted in the two years since the Consolidation Treaty re-opened the planet to the interstellar community. Our room in the V-K Splendide is adequate but unremarkable. It will be useful to relax, to discuss what is to come, to prepare.

**E**vening falls sharply, and sooner than I hoped. Now Silas Breir escorts us to a gambling house where we are to be introduced to Carnegie Voller. “He has control of Voller-Kalder,” Breir tells us. Voller-Kalder is one of the planet’s largest family-business combines, which means Carnegie Voller is highly placed in the grey area behind the planet’s President-Select-regional council power hierarchy.

“He has political influence?” I ask, testing to see how much Breir knows, how much he chooses to share with us.

Breir shrugs, then shakes his head. “He would think so, perhaps, but...” Which means yes, of course. “He is a less positive facet to the Pavonian story,” Breir continues. “I am not sure why he asks to see you.”

I choose to say nothing, but Cezarro speaks up. “He hired us,” he says, and he chuckles inside our head at the discomfort written on Breir’s features. It is not entirely true that Voller hired us – our contract is between Jurassic and the Lupert-Grijns regional council – but the deal was instigated by Voller’s private office.

“A representative of the Select cannot be aware of everything,” Breir says, as we thread our way through the casino to Voller’s private wing. “I hope my words will not be misinterpreted.”

Carnegie Voller is a slightly overweight man of middling years. When we see him he is wearing a formal white body-stocking, softened by a grey tunic and gloves. His black hair is tied back with a length of silk ribbon and his stare is penetrating. He has the manner of one accustomed to power, and I can sense Cezarro warming to him immediately. Rafe hangs back, in our head, and we both acquiesce as Cezarro takes control. Although we are three discrete personae, our one body necessitates a form of consensual command: a bio-processor grown into our left cerebral cortex assimilates mental commands to the body’s muscles and assesses the correct response. Thus, if one of us wants to speak, or to walk, or to jump, and the others are compliant, that one is in control and we speak, walk, jump; if there is a conflict of desires than the majority takes control – if Rafe and I wished to remain silent, Cezarro would be unable to say, as

he does, “Mr Voller, it is good to make your acquaintance.”

Rafe and I let Cezarro and Voller establish an amicable relationship. I observe, as ever, noting that Breir hovers nervously in the background, occasionally eyeing the bodyguards placed strategically around Voller. At one point, while Voller is being consulted by one of his assistants, I ask Cezarro why he has taken such a liking to the Pavonian.

– Kieran, my friend, he replies. It is a question of rapport, not one of like or dislike. You must open yourself, if you are to truly experience another world, or another person. You must immerse yourself if communication is to proceed.

He often speaks in such a vein, but this time I suspect that he is hiding something, a trait of his own of which perhaps even he is unaware. In short, I suspect him of simple snobbery, that he has recognized in Voller’s casual authority an echo of his own noble origins. I do not communicate my suspicions. We have to live together, after all.

“The land the Burul’chasi occupy is high in mineral potential,” says Voller, later. “We require full information about the region before any decisions are taken. You will report directly to me and, if necessary, I will go there myself. I am a participant, gentlemen – I get things done. This project is my personal concern. We are an expanding colony with expanding needs; more so since our Consolidation with the Interstitial community.” He spreads his hands. “The potential of this region could be pivotal to Pavonis Minor’s renaissance. We must consider the requirements of the entire Pavonian population.”

– And Voller-Kalder, adds Rafe.

Now I wonder if my cohabitee is politically motivated, but I keep my thoughts to myself. If he is, then he has kept it remarkably well concealed. I do not believe that his reason for returning to Pavonis Minor can be as simple as that. Anything unsavoury would have been screened out during our construction.

Voller’s statement is the first indication that there was a commercial motive for hiring us to investigate the Burul’chasi people, although the cost of our deployment, alone, would indicate such a probability. At his words I felt, as so often, the momentary spark of protest, the hope that my skills are not to be put to a negative use, but I calmed my thoughts. Our observations, the pictures from our eyes, will be delivered to Voller, but simultaneously they will be transmitted to Jurassic Informatic for multi-media dissemination. Our observations will enter the public domain. If I have a single principle it is that knowledge should be spread, that data should be free. In that way, perhaps, I am an intellectual revolutionary.

**T**his morning, Silas Breir came early to the hotel and watched as we ate breakfast. “What if your tastes conflict?” he asked, at one point. There was clearly a lot he would like to ask, if social propriety did not intervene.

“They do not,” said Cezarro. “Not now.” We spooned the chilled lentil stew into our mouth. “The social class structure of Capella Gregoria forbids me to eat pulses,” he continued, gesturing at our meal, “but that ethic was not copied into the analogue that rides this body.” Knowing our body so well, I detected



Cezarro's sneer, but I doubt that Breir noticed. Cezarro is such a snob.

The city streets were thronged with people, out early for their work. Market traders, garbage compilers, goods being transported on horse-drawn carts. Levels of technology were low, in general – a sign of Pavonis Minor's traditionally isolationist politics, Cezarro observed. Before setting out we had dressed in a protective skin-suit: complete environmental isolation from the chin down, it allowed the body to breathe and moisture to pass out but nothing could enter unless the outfit's fabric was breached. Breir wore his normal clothing along with a pair of gauntleted leather gloves he produced as we approached the docks. Our attire attracted a ripple of curious glances, following us from street to street.

Now, we sit in the boat, soothed by the throb of its engines and the chatter of the two-man crew. The estuary is several hours behind us and the vegetation growing in the River Burul's shallows has steadily changed as the acidity has crept upwards. The estuary, where the acid was regularly diluted by tidal inflow, had been fringed with Terran reeds and succulents, their rich greenness at odds with the gentler hues native to Pavonis Minor.

– Spikes of wavering-grass grow up from twisting masses of racemose moss, says Rafe, contributing the native's commentary as I focus on the nearest bank. Our eyes are tank-grown, giving a precision normally only available with non-biological optics. A memory-chip, located where the optic nerve interfaces with our brain, saves the images; auditory, tactile and olfactory data can also be stored. We are a recording machine.

– The clusters of small flowers you can see are, in fact, seed pods which will be dropped into the river where the acid will break their shells and they will take root downstream. Nobody knows how they spread upstream.

This is all worthy stuff, and will no doubt be scrapped. Breir is sitting by us and now he breaks into our work. "You do not, I think, realize what an exclusive opportunity the Burul'chasi offer you."

He is clearly unaware that one of us is a native Pavonian and so we are fully aware of the opportunity afforded us. We have also been briefed. We wait for him to continue, as it is apparent he wants to say more.

"Very few Pavonians can enter Chasi territory in safety, you know. Perhaps a few of the Pastorals do – some even trade a little – but anyone from farther afield is at grave peril. And yet you come from the stars to record them. It took much effort to persuade them to allow you in."

"What are the dangers?" asks Cezarro.

"Individuals and teams have tried to penetrate the Burul'chasi jungle, but many have not returned. Voller-Kalder have sent in teams to assess resource potentials of the area, by air and by boat, and many report sabotage, ambush and even open aggression. That, presumably, is why they have hired you to report for them: to learn how to defeat the Chasi people and claim their territory."

The three of us consult, but we agree that, as our reports are agency property, they will be a public commodity and, as such, we cannot be held responsible for use or misuse of publicly held information. I think



Illustrations by Russell Morgan

it unlikely that Voller could gain in this way, in any case. I think, perhaps, he has merely tried to tackle an unknown in his own crude way and failed, so now he is casting for more information.

"The Burul'chasi are a fascinating people," says Breir. "Every native Pavonian feels an empathy with their ways and their intimacy with the great jungle."

"Even Voller?" asks Cezarro.

Breir thinks for a moment. "Perhaps especially Carnegie Voller. He has a lodge on the fringe of the jungle which he visits often. We are all drawn. There is something magical about the forest: you can feel it inside your head at times. If there is intelligent non-human life on Pavonis Minor I sometimes feel that the jungle must be the prime candidate..." He looks embarrassed, suddenly, at having opened himself up to such an extent. "I wish I could accompany you," he says. "I would like to see the Chasi again."

It's clearly an intentional slip: his admission that he is one of the few to have gained access to the Burul'chasi. Perhaps he wishes to distract us from his lapse into airy mysticism.

"But they specified that only one person should come to observe them," says Cezarro, "and that that one person should be an outside reporter, someone from across the great Interstice of space."

"No," says Breir, apparently enjoying his disclosure. "Their messenger added that specification in order to ensure that the situation on Pavonis Minor should be disseminated as widely as possible, and therefore that any assault on the Chasi – by Voller or whoever – would also be a public affair. They took a great deal of persuasion."

During our conversation with Breir I have become aware of something new in Rafe's familiar nervous tension. Presumably it is because he is now in his home territory, a region he left some years ago for reasons of his own. I decide not to press him.

The jungle is rising on either side of the river and the heat has become intense. The only Terran life that persists this far south are the hordes of tiny hunch-backed mosquitoes which hang over the river's surface, making the occasional foray towards the boat in search of sustenance. The trees are a mere ten or so metres in height here, but their spread is immense. Each trunk is perhaps forty metres from its nearest neighbour, but its branches begin from near its base and spread vigorously outwards, merging with each other so that it is impossible to identify the extent of a single tree. I think again of Breir's words. It is as if the jungle is a single organism, anchored at regular intervals by these wide-boled trunks. Rafe informs us that the pattern repeats itself below the ground, with the roots running together like the branches. It is immediately obvious why we enter the Burul'chasi jungle by boat.

One of the crew comes forward and gestures at the sky, now heavy with bulging brown clouds. "It will rain," he says simply.

We shelter together towards the rear, under the boat's single canopy. The rain will be almost as acid as the River Burul's waters. Perhaps not potent enough to do any lasting damage, but still enough to cause a degree of discomfort. We sit and watch the rain and the passing jungle, and in our head I marvel at how the mosquitoes still dance unharmed over the river's surface.

We are on our own now. The boat deposited us in a clearing over an hour ago and left with Breir's reminder echoing back across the water that he would return for us as soon as we called. A trail led away from the clearing and we are now following it, relying on Rafe's knowledge to ensure that we do not trigger the defences of any of the dangerous plants which are occasionally to be found.

Eventually, Rafe picks out a sound from the background hisses and crackles of the vegetation and the invertebrate life and we know that we have found them, or that they have found us.

We turn carefully, hands held palm outwards, twisting at the waist. Two men occupy the trail ten metres back. One holds a spear, ready to throw. They are both about our height, with lean, athletic bodies, clothed only in loin cloths and arm-bands. Leaves are tied into the hair that grows from patches on the back of their heads and their skin is –

Cezarro is panicking. It feels as though moths are trapped inside our skull, beating at its interior, trying to find a way out. He has noticed their skin, or perhaps their spears. No...it is definitely their skin.

It must be the acid – it falls as rain, native plants trap and concentrate it for defence and predation, it runs in all of the jungle's rivers and streams – it must be the acid that scars them so. I look at the native who stands, spear resting on the ground. His ears are reduced to mere stubs, his nose has been eaten entirely away. His eyelids are absent so that he constantly stares through watering eyes, the tears running down over the rough scar-tissue landscape of his cheeks. His lips are ragged and partially dissolved, so that he wears a permanent snarl, made all the more threatening by the gaps in his teeth.

We had been warned of the effects of life in the Burul'chasi jungle but there had been no images to make it real. We are the first reporter to get this close.

For myself, I find their appearance interesting but not disturbing. I am a neutral observer, I have seen far worse. But there is something more...something I cannot quite identify. Cezarro is over his initial reaction and is now pretending that it never happened. And now I realize why my feelings are tinged with something else: Rafe. Our partner is expressing a peculiar mix of emotions – fear, yes, but there is a memory there, a feeling of nostalgia and, perhaps, longing – and they are seeping over to affect me and, I presume, Cezarro. In theory such a thing should not happen: within our single cranium we are still three people, or three analogues according to Cezarro. We do not know each other's thoughts or feelings. But then, emotion is not purely a mental thing, it is endocrinal, cardiac, pulmonary: it is a whole-body experience, a state of arousal to be interpreted and promoted by the mental processes of the brain. Perhaps it is through our shared body that Rafe's feelings seep out.

My two partners swivel the body again, so that our eyes take in four more Chasi who have appeared ahead of us on the trail. Rafe speaks, our language different again, although some Pavonian words are common to the Chasi dialect: "We are the Jurassic. We were brought by Silas Breir along the majestic-river Burul. We are a part of the Great Tree of Life." As we speak, that final phrase brings me to a sense of

oneness, a religious impulse, a feeling of awe. I don't know whether it has seeped over our barriers or the feeling is my own. I realize that Rafe must have seen people like this before, although he has clearly never been one of them, himself. There is also a feeling of repulsion, emanating from Cezarro. I resist both feelings and strive for neutrality; I concentrate on our eyes, ensuring that the scene is recorded as effectively as possible.

"You would be dead already if that was not so," says one of the Chasi. He turns and heads off along the trail so we follow and, in turn, are followed by the two who had initially appeared behind us. It would appear that we have little choice.

**T**he village of the Burul'chasi is an impressive creation. There is a central tree trunk which is decorated with leaves and bones and appears to have some deep spiritual importance. They call it simply the Tree, as opposed to the Great Tree, which is the name they give the forest. Where branches grow from the base of the Tree they have been guided up and then across at a height of a little over two metres; here they form an intricate canopy, branches criss-crossing, twigs intertwined, the hair-like air-roots woven into a fine lacework, all filled out by a mass of leaves and buds and new shoots. The ground beneath is dry, as if rain has not penetrated the canopy for decades. In places, branches have been drawn downwards to form partitions and screens, private areas for family groups, a men's room, a women's room, a holy booth for what appears to be some kind of shaman-cum-leader.

No one has spoken to us since we arrived at this settlement, except to say that we must stay away from the shaman's booth. "I know," Rafe told them, but since then he has been silent. I am a little worried by him, but I do not know what we can do; perhaps it is more a worry for him – this journey has clearly been an emotional one. What I do know is that his local knowledge has already proven both invaluable and informative. I ask Cezarro what he is thinking and he replies,

– Look at the women. They dress just like the men – a loin cloth, a set of arm-bands – yet look at their skin, their hair.

He is right. It is true that they, too, are scarred by acid-burns; but as I noticed on our arrival, the extent of the damage is far less extreme. Their ears, eye-lids, lips and noses are intact, their scalp has not been burned away in uneven patches, their bodies are marked but not heavily disfigured. Their scarring, on the whole, is more superficial than that of their male counterparts. The children, too, are barely marked. Our eyes record this fact, and Cezarro asks me what I think.

– It is not my place to think, I tell him. I observe.

– Nobody is your perfect neutral observer, he replies. We all must think. Perhaps they never leave the settlement? Could that be it?

But my powers of observation are more refined than Cezarro's. I am a professional. I have noted already that the women are constantly coming and going along the various trails that branch out from the settlement. They return with fruit and dead animals and sloshing buckets; they are not a protected élite. I ask

Rafe for more information but he refuses to reply, so I return to my observations, my recording, and Cezarro watches the women.

**W**e have been here for five of the long Pavonian days and we are on the verge of a notable breakthrough.

Our presence is still begrudged but now the Chasi are more accustomed to us following them, recording their conversations, their actions. Cezarro has come into his own. His encyclopedic knowledge of the diversity of human cultures both informs his commentaries and yields him insights that are hidden from me, the observer. He is able to note a gesture, to spot its echo in others, to classify a whole range of body language that has evolved since the Burul'chasi and their relative groups throughout this jungle branched away from the human mainstream over 180 standard years ago. We have observed the activities of the settlement's shaman; we have listened to his sermons and commandments and from this Cezarro has pieced together an idea of the spiritual life of the Burul'chasi. The jungle, the Great Tree, is central to their beliefs. It gives life and it nurtures them and teaches them and finally it returns them to the soil. Cezarro says this is fundamentally a Christian ideal, with the pagan symbol of the Great Tree as a God-surrogate. In his view of this matter I detect a cultural bias: an implication that the Chasi are primitives and therefore mistaken. I had never suspected that cynical Cezarro might have religious leanings, somewhere in the depths of our mind.

This morning something important is happening and, although we were not invited, we follow and have not yet been turned away.

We woke to the sound of female voices, raised in a jarring cacophony which threatened to befuddle our senses. We sleep in the open, so as soon as we awoke we were able to survey the settlement and establish that the women had gathered in one of the larger enclosures, which they were sealing off with a branch drawn down from the canopy. The settlement's children were in another enclosure, listening to an old man's story.

Our head jerked towards the shaman's booth and we saw that the men were gathered there, beginning to process out along one of the trails, led by the shaman and a group of adolescent boys.

All in agreement, we rose and followed.

The procession was brief, punctuated only – in our head – by Cezarro's observation that this was clearly some kind of rite of passage: these boys would become men today.

– If they are brave, said Rafe, before returning to his customary silence.

It was then that I began to feel uneasy.

Now, we stand in a small clearing, sky above us for the first time since our journey along the River Burul. I try to remain calm, detached. I try to remain unaffected by Cezarro's excitement and Rafe's indecipherable feelings, but it is hard, with our body humming with adrenalin, our heart thumping, our skin prickling beneath its protective suit.

I concentrate on observing, on recording. I swivel our body at the hips to take in the jungle rising behind us, around us and, after about forty metres, ahead of us.



The clearing occupied by this group of men and boys is uneven and rocky, overgrown in places by a bristly green mat which exudes acid underfoot. Between the far side of the clearing and the return of the jungle there is a pool, fringed by one or two wisps of vegetation but otherwise apparently lifeless. A mound rises by the pool and now the shaman pauses before it.

He gives a signal and, as the men and boys form a semi-circle around him, they begin to chant, a deep sound that reverberates through the rock and up into our body, matching the pace of our heart, the blood in our arteries and veins.

We stop at the fringe of the semi-circle and watch as the shaman crouches and lowers cupped hands into the pool. A boy steps forward and squats before his elder. He gives a faint whimper as the cupped hands open over his head, the liquid runs down onto his scalp, and his hair begins to melt. He stifles his cries as more of the pool's acid is poured over his head. Somehow the shaman's hands are unharmed by the process; presumably the scar tissue is so thick as to be protective.

Cezarro says something about the expressions of compassion on the watching men's faces. He is right. They have all been through this themselves. The term he uses is *savage nobility*, and for a moment I see what he means, before I return to observing, and Cezarro to his commentary. He says that this is not an unheard of phenomenon: the mental strength necessary to survive the rite, the respect and acceptance it earns, is a common currency of status right across the human spectrum. Some of the ritual scarifications practised on pre-exodus Earth were far more severe, he says.

Now, the shaman has baptised four of the seven boys. The man we have identified as his understudy has started a second stage of this rite. He reaches into a bucket and comes up with a handful of a thick, greasy substance. The first boy – his expression now glazed over with resolve – removes his loin cloth and the man smears the boy's genitals with his grease. Our body flinches at that, but the substance does not appear to burn or to do any harm at all. Cezarro says this stage must have some kind of fertility significance.

We watch, we wait, as the last of the boys has his genitals daubed. I wonder what will happen next.

The men change their chant to a faster one and I can sense Rafe's intense anxiety, the urge to run, to flee. I realize that he has witnessed this ritual before and as his emotions flood our body I sense that on that occasion he had, indeed, fled.

We stand still, at the fringe of the group of men and the now separate group of burnt and daubed boys.

The first boy clambers up the mound, the shaman barks a command and the boy jumps clear of the mound, out over the still pool. He screams as he breaks the mirror surface, and then his scream is cut off as he is entirely submerged.

My calm neutrality is finally shattered. I want to do something but our body does not respond, my impulses being over-ridden by my two partners.

– Observe, says Cezarro. *Understand.*

His voice simply adds to my discomfort.

The second boy jumps and then the first returns to

the surface, limp at first, then moving, slowly. The pool cannot be deep as he appears to be standing with the burning liquid up to his waist. The second boy rises and, as the third jumps from the mound, the first two struggle back to the bank. As they pull clear of the pool, the extent of the damage becomes painfully apparent and still I am anchored to the ground.

The skin of each boy has been almost entirely eaten away except, apparently, for that area protected by the daubing of the shaman's assistant. They are both a mass of raw flesh, bone showing through their hands and feet, teeth exposed. Somehow, when they are clear of the pool they remain standing, supporting each other as the shaman showers them with some kind of dust. The third boy escapes the pool more rapidly and is less seriously burnt.

I watch in horror as the fourth, fifth, and sixth boys dive from the mound and struggle out anew, as men, not boys. The seventh has watched the others and, standing on the mound, is clearly terrified. He jumps and screams, and then has trouble standing and has to be hauled from the pool by the shaman and his assistant.

My professional detachment has fled me and I am immensely grateful that the whole thing is over. I start to voice that thought in our head for the others when I realize that something has changed.

Our body begins to move and I sense that it is Rafe in control. I query my partners and all Cezarro says is, – Observe, my friend. Just observe.

I start to panic as Rafe reaches for the release hasp of our skin-suit and starts to unpeel our protective layer. I... I think I know what he...

We reach for the bucket and smear our sexless crotch with the shaman's protective grease and I struggle to seize control of our body. We stagger, remain upright, as I fight Rafe for control. Nearby, one of the boys has finally collapsed.

Why isn't Cezarro helping? What does he think he's doing?

We straighten as Cezarro finally intervenes. My gratitude towards him is tempered by anger that he took so long to join me in overpowering Rafe. And then we step towards the mound.

– What are you doing? I scream into the void of our head.

– This isn't our body, says Cezarro quietly. It is a vehicle. We are not us – we are merely analogue reproductions of selected parts of our real selves. We have nothing to lose.

The coolness of his voice shocks me. Horrifies me. We climb the mound and look around at the silent men of the Burul'chasi.

– The only way to understand a culture is to merge with it, to become one with its ideals and its ways. Believe me, Kieran: this is the way to comprehension.

We step to the front of the mound and look out over the mirror surface of the pool. There is nothing I can do. Our body is in Rafe's hands.

We breathe in, hold the air in our lungs, and jump.

**T**ime has lost its footing. Pain is so familiar as to have shrugged off all meaning. We survive. Here, in our skull, we survive.

I am not aware of how long we have been like this.

We are in a camp apart from the main settlement of



the Tree. But the Great Tree is around us, protecting us, and for that we are grateful. We are tended by the shaman and a small group of adult males who are not true men. They bear only the scars of the rain and the plants, they never passed to manhood in the pool of life. They nurse us, soothing our burns with ointments and powders and damp leaves from the Great Tree. For that, too, I am grateful.

Although I have tried, I am unable to recall anything after we jumped from that mound and the mirror-surfaced pool was suddenly below us. It is all blank. It is purely a mental thing; every detail will be recorded on our storage chip but we are unable to access it—professional facilities are required for that.

As time has progressed in its erratic way I have decided to be grateful for that memory gap. The body remembers, that is enough.

I know I have ranted and raged, here in our single cranium. To that the only response was Cezarro's gentle reassurance that this is the only way to know, the only way to see. Cezarro merely frustrates me, but he did break through to Rafe, on one occasion. All he said was,

— Why?

— I was brought up in the Meth'uran settlements, farming on the fringes of existence. I didn't like it, I wanted to be free.

His words and sentences were spaced out and awkward, but once he had started Rafe was unable to stop. He continued,

— It's the trees...the Great Tree. Everyone who knows the jungle knows the pull of it, the need to be a part of it. It calls to you. Maybe in that respect I was no different to everyone else. I explored. Each time I went deeper, deeper, until finally I made contact with the Burul'chasi — not this group, another, many kilometres away — and eventually I earned their acceptance...and then they led me out with a group of other boys and...and I couldn't do it. I ran. They let me go, I had failed. I lived in Lupert-Grijns, and then when the Interstitial ships came I worked my passage out.

I wondered how his desire to return and do what he had done had survived the persona selection and compression we had all undergone in order to be fitted into this one body. I voiced my query and Cezarro replied with a question of his own.

— Did you plan to do this, Rafe?

The silence was enough for me to realize that the only way such a suicidal urge could have survived was if it had been hidden even from its originator. Finally, Rafe spoke again.

— I have done it, he said. Now I am Chasi.

— We all did it, said Cezarro.

— We? I? said Rafe. What is the difference?

And Cezarro could not reply.

I have been delirious, here in the bosom of the Great Tree. Visions have come and gone, like dreams, only more so, or less so; or analogues of dreams, Cezarro might say. The branches of the Great Tree have engulfed me, swept me up, and my body has felt blissfully cool and at peace. I have been dashed against the ground, against the banks of the River Burul. I have been dragged out of their snug embrace, born again into a world that is immediately



alien, immediately familiar. I have been a young, aristocratic man, persevering with my studies even though I have always felt there was more to life than learning, that there was experience, that the universe was out there, waiting to be lived. I have been an adolescent running, fearfully, through an awful, frightening jungle, losing my way, struggling, suffering acid burns from the plants I stumble against, even as I run from a fear of pain. I have been a young reporter, watching slaughter and injustice on planet after planet and doing nothing because I am neutral, uninformed.

I surface in order to eat and be tended. Cezarro and Rafe are no better. We three suffer in unison. Rafe repeats yet again that he has done it, whatever it is, but Cezarro contradicts him.

— No, Rafe, my friend, he says. We are doing it now. This is where we become Burul'chasi. This is "it."

— We're not Burul'chasi, I say. We are independent. We are observers. We have to report.

— Can't you feel the Great Tree? asks Rafe. Can't you feel it embracing our mind?

I think of those cool branches, soothing me, engulfing me. I remember feelings of empathy with a beneficent sentience too all-encompassing to fully comprehend. I don't know what it means. I remember the delirium we suffered following our construction and wonder if it has recurred. I try not to think. I am merely an observer.

— Everybody feels it, continues Rafe. Or at least a trace of it. That's why we're all so drawn towards the jungle. We all want to be one with the Great Tree, with the world. Some of us fight it, some of us flee... and some are so scared they lash out and attempt to destroy it.

— Voller, says Cezarro.

— We have to get out and report, I say, trying to remind myself of our duties. I cannot cope with all this debate. I have to remain neutral.

— Impossible, says Cezarro. We are Burul'chasi. We cannot leave. It is not allowed.

I don't know what to think. I'm not sure I know how to think any more. There is truth in what we say, what we think. I have seen the things Cezarro and Rafe have seen but I still believe them to be delusions, a part of the recovery process. One has to remain rational.

I have to be honest with myself and admit to the awful compulsion to assimilate with the Burul'chasi, to become a part of the Great Tree. I try to think of reasons, of psychotropic secretions that adduct us to the jungle, of vast, alien organisms that can grow over hectares and hectares and communicate with humanity through visions and dreams. It is all so fantastical. I sometimes feel that I have come close to the truth, but if so, I am barely skimming the surface. I feel that if there is any truth then it is far too big a Truth to be encompassed by a single human mind such as our own.

We are walking now, and have been accepted back into the settlement of the Tree. Our body has healed with remarkable speed—the shaman and his assistant must be skilled in the arts of healing—and there is even a sense of vitality lurking in our every movement. We have passed through an awful trauma and

now we are strong. There is little, after this, that can daunt us.

I remain, detached within our skull. Trying to understand, and never quite grasping what has happened.

Cezarro and Rafe have rediscovered a sense of purpose. They know that if we do not return to Lupert-Grijns, then Voller will lose patience and might attempt something we would all regret. He must not attack the Great Tree, mineral resources or no.

We found the transmitter on our old suit and called Silas Breir. He was ready for us, even though we had been some weeks longer than expected. He said he was glad we had called because Carnegie Voller was getting impatient. Then he added that he was also glad that we had survived, although he had never doubted we would. The shaman had taken some persuasion before he would let us leave, but he had finally given his consent.

When we climbed onto the boat Breir studied our appearance for a long time, before nodding and giving the command to start up to the boat's driver. Back in Lupert-Grijns he provided the facilities we requested—an editing console so that we could manipulate our recording—and then he brought us here to the offices of Voller-Kalder.

Carnegie Voller is in his favoured body-stocking and tunic. He flicks his tail of black hair over his shoulder and tips his chair, appraising our ravaged visage over steeped fingers. I remember his words at our first meeting: "I am a participant, gentleman. I get things done." He nods slowly and then voices a command to his desk. The formalities are over and he is eager to view our report.

He plays it on a wide wall-screen, skimming forward through the jumbled succession of background shots and natural-history commentaries. He wants to see the Burul'chasi. He wants to understand them. He wants them—it is so obvious—out of his way.

He reaches our first encounter on the trail to the Tree and I can see that he is fascinated and appalled. I can sense that he is drawn—the Rafe in me recognizes the feeling. And the Cezarro speaks.

"They are weak," we say. "They are there for the taking." It is our duty to report to Carnegie Voller, it is our professional ethic. He hired us.

Voller skims onward through our first few days and then to the initiation. It is here that Silas Breir's console has been put to use. We try not to betray our tension. The screen shows the boys being baptised, their heads doused in the holy water of the pool. It shows the men looking on. The viewpoint shifts until we stand on the mound.

I do not dare look at Voller. Either he is hooked or we have failed. An analysis of the report will reveal our editing but we expect him to be too eager to commission one.

The viewpoint jumps, hits the pool, goes black.

At last we meet Voller's eyes and know that he has not spotted the joins. "Our sight went at that point," we say. "Currently we can see, but not record. It can be fixed, if necessary."

"And you say they treat you like a god, now?" He still harbours doubts, naturally.

"I would not be so extreme, sir," says Cezarro. "But

they granted our every wish. Total immersion made us so much more holy than mere baptism, we believe. The shaman has potions that hastened our healing – we only took so long to return because we enjoyed the sense of authority so much.” We smile.

“You think I could do it?” It was unexpected for his arrogance to lapse in this way.

“I did,” says Cezarro. “Fear is understa—”

Voller’s arrogance snapped back into place. I recognized it: it was so Capellan. The idea that we could do something that was beyond Carnegie Voller was inconceivable.

“And a body can always be repaired,” says Cezarro.

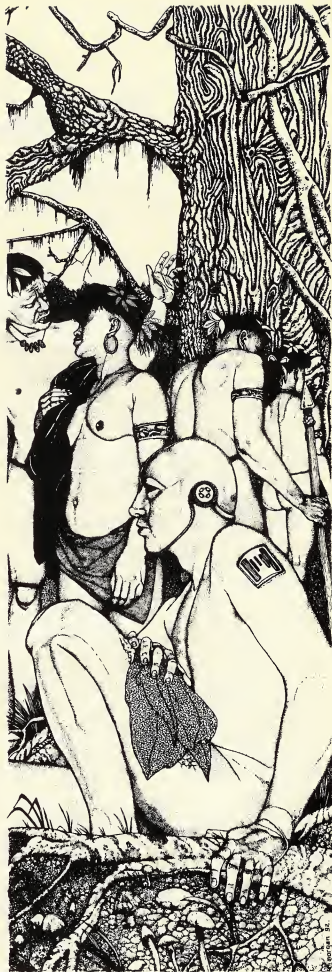
As Voller snaps commands to his assistant, we know, now, for certain, that he will accompany us back to the home of the Burul’chasi, that he will immerse himself in the pool of life and then, without a doubt, he will embark on the self-learning that is central to the healing process. And when the Great Tree has embraced him, when it has shared the shape of his mind and opened him to the wonder of all existence...then he will be Burul’chasi and the jungle will be safe again, for a time. We close our eyes and picture him jumping, and now the Great Tree within us is content.

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**Keith Brooke**, born 1966, published his first short story in *Interzone* issue 34 and has since produced three science-fiction novels before the age of 26 – *Keepers of the Pace* (1990), *Expotria* (1991), and *Expotria Incorporated* (1992), all published in the UK by Gollancz. This is an unusual achievement nowadays, when most writers have to wait until they’re past 30 before making an sf novel debut (vide Eric Brown and Greg Egan). Keith has recently completed a fourth book which he describes as “a fantasy novel without much fantasy, triggered by the thought of what George Orwell might make of modern Spain after his experiences in the Civil War (although I’ve since edited out the bits about Orwell, the Civil War, and Spain...).”

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# Britworld™

## James Lovegrove

**H**ill! Welcome to Britworld™. My name is Wanda-May-June and I will be your guide, hostess and compère for the duration of the tour. If you have any questions about anything you see here today, I will be more than happy to answer them.

Thank you for coming prepared with warm clothing. The temperature in Britworld™ is kept at a refreshing five degrees all year round. USACorp Entertainments have gone to great lengths to enhance the authenticity of your experience by reproducing the exact climate of the original. This also means a regulation four-and-a-half hours of rain per day. If there is anyone who here suffers from respiratory ailments or is in any way inconvenienced by the Britworld™ environment, do not hesitate to leave by one of the emergency exits, one of which you will see over there, marked "EXIT."

Now, has everyone got their umbrellas, or "bumbershoots" as we in Britworld™ call them?

Good. Then why don't you follow me to the first sector? Thank you!

Here we find ourselves in a typical urban situation. This is in fact London, which was the capital of Britworld™ and home to the famous Beatles.

The wind is a little gusty today. Look how it speeds the clouds along! There is a ninety-seven per cent chance of rain later.

A brief technical note. The sky that you are now seeing is, of course, projected on to the underside of the geodesic dome. Now, whereas other theme parks use simple loop-sequences of an hour or so in length, the clouds here are generated using the latest in Chaos Model programs. Thus no two are ever alike. Some are large, some are small. That one looks like a duck, doesn't it? We at USACorp Entertainments are justly proud of innovations such as these that keep us one step ahead of the competition.

As you cross the street, mind your step on the piles of garbage – or "rubbish" as it is known here.

Yes, it does smell kind of bad, doesn't it? But you must remember that in the real Britworld™ they had never heard of efficient disposal or recycling.

Whoops! Are we all right, ma'am? Good. I can see that you haven't suffered any serious injury, but I should take this opportunity to say to you all that in the eventuality of an accident situation, USACorp Entertainments will accept zero liability. You all signed the disclaimer forms at the entrance.

Please try to keep up!

Let's wait here a few minutes at this bus stop. If we are lucky, we may see a genuine double-decker bus. The word "bus" is short for "omnibus," which is pretty much the same thing as a coach. A double-decker is a bus with two decks. Hence the name. It is red and will have a number on the front, signifying its route, and a destination – perhaps the Houses of Parliament, where Guy Fawkes lived, or Hyde Park, named after the alter-ego of the famous scientist Dr Jekyll, or maybe the Globe Theater, which was built by William Shakespeare.

Any minute now, there may be an omnibus. There may even be two. Or three!

Double-decker buses have a seating capacity of sixty-eight, forty-four on top, twenty-four below – not forgetting, of course, standing room for another twenty passengers.

Any...minute...now.

It doesn't look like one's coming. What a disappointment. Well, we can't hang around all day. Let's proceed along this road to the market.

Many historians consider the market to be an early precursor of the mall. Notice how each stall sells a different product, what we know as franchising. Here is the fruit and vegetable stall, selling fruit and vegetables. It is tended by a cheerful man known as a green-grocer. The name is derived from the fact that a large proportion of his groceries are green in color.

Listen.

"Apples and pears! Apples and pears! Get yer apples and pears!"

Isn't that clever? USACorp Entertainments have taken every effort to reduplicate the Britworld™ dialect, incomprehensible now to a large proportion of the English-speaking world.

Little boy, the automata are extremely fragile. Please don't touch.

I would just like to show you this. A strawberry. Everybody! Look at this strawberry.

Yes, sir, I suppose it does bear a slight resemblance to a wino's nose, but believe me, it is delicious. Mmm-hmmmmmm!

No, I won't eat one.

Look! Here is a second-hand clothing stall. And here is the bric-a-brac stall. Bric-a-brac is another word for junk, what we would call antiques. Incidentally, licensed reproductions of both clothing and bric-a-brac are available at the merchandising kiosk,



which we will come to at the end of the tour.

What's this I see? A horse pulling a cart, and an old raggedy man driving. Why, it's the rag-and-bone man! There he goes, clip-clop, clip-clop, on his busy way to buy more rags and bones.

I'd like you all to inhale deeply now. Here we go. In. Out. In. Out. Can you smell it? That smoky odor is a chemically-safe atmospheric simulation of the smell of the original London, capital city of Britworld™, correct down to the slightest whiff. Fossil fuels, rotten vegetable matter, urine, regurgitated food and dog excreta, all are to be smelled here in synthetic form. Those gratings in the gutter are in fact the vents through which the mixture is pumped into the Britworld™ environment. USACorp Entertainments R & D Department spent two whole years researching and developing the correct balance of odor elements.

On the street corner we see the newsvendor, vending newspapers. Let's listen to his distinctive cry.

"Paperrrr! Getcha paperrrrr heeereee!"

The cloth cap and raincoat he is wearing are the real thing, the genuine article, as is all the clothing you will see today, purchased at great cost by USACorp Entertainments from museums all over the world.

Beyond the newsvendor you may already have spotted the street musicians, or "buskers," so called because they used to play on buses until the law banned them. The tune they are playing is a traditional folk ballad, "Strawberry Fields Forever." Remember that strawberry I showed you earlier? Well, this song was written, so they say, about fields of strawberries stretching so far into the distance that they actually seemed to go on for ever.

Don't the buskers sing well?

**W**e are standing outside a pub, the Britworld™ equivalent of a bar. "Pub" is short for public house, a house into which the public may enter whenever they wish. This one has a name. The King's Head. On the sign up there we see a picture of the head of the King. Notice his crown. Shall we go in?

Here we see the inhabitants of Britworld™ relaxing in the friendly, intimate atmosphere of the pub. At the bar we see the landlord and landlady, so called because they rent out the house to the public.

This is Charly, a cheerful local. Cheerful locals in London were known as Cockneys because – so legend goes – they were born within the sound of the bells of Cockney Cathedral. Tell us, Charly, do you enjoy drinking here?

"Gor blimey, luvaduck, I should say. Crikey, strike me blind if I jolly bloomin' well don't! Lor Lumme! Eh, guvnor?"

I think he does!

Now follow me, everyone. Don't try that, sir. It's not safe to drink. It's a substitute for the popular pub drink, beer, designed to maintain its color and consistency and that distinctive frothy head for approximately eighteen years.

Let's hurry on to the next sector. But I must warn you, be prepared to be thrilled, chilled and spilled! Those with heart conditions or nervous complaints might consider leaving by the nearest convenient emergency exit over there, marked "EXIT."

Where are we? Fog swirls along darkened streets and the gas lamps flicker, casting strange shadows on the sidewalk. Villains surely lurk in this fog-en shrouded place.

But look where we are! Baker's Street. How many of you know which well-known historical personality lived in Baker's Street?

No.

No.

No, not the Reverend Jim Bakker.

No.

No, it was Sherlock Holmes! And if we are lucky, we may just catch a glimpse...

Ah! There! The deerstalker, the cape, the pipe. It can only be... And yes, there is his friend and faithful companion, Dr Watson.

"The game's afoot."

"Good heavens, Holmes! How on earth did you deduce that?"

"Elementary, my dear Watson. You see, but you do not observe."

And so the great detective sweeps past us on his way to solving another baffling, mystifying, perplexing mystery. So close, so realistic, you could reach out and touch him.

But who is that? A woman, wandering the night streets, vulnerable and alone. She must be careful. There's murder in the air.

Oh, look out! That man in the top hat and cloak! He has a knife! He is Jack the Ripper, that terrible fiend of the night and depraver of women! Who will save her? Who will save her?

Hooray! Here comes a friendly policeman, whose name is Bobby. He blows his whistle. That's seen that dreadful Ripper off! Look how Bobby is comforting that poor woman. How safe she must feel.

Well, I'm quite breathless with excitement. Everybody follow me to the next sector.

Oh dear. Bumpershoots up everyone! As the saying in Britworld™ goes, "It's raining buckets of cats."

If you can't hear me over the rain, say so and I will speak up. Okay?

Good.

This grand edifice is none other than the Buckingham Palace itself, the home of the King and Queen of Britworld™. USACorp Entertainments, sparing no expense, had the original building transported brick by brick and reconstructed here. See how the proud Union Jack, royal flag of Britworld™, flutters from the mast on the Palace roof.

The Palace has a large number of large rooms and a smaller number of small rooms. All interiors have been recreated down to the finest detail. However, as we are running a little late, we'll have to skip that part of the tour.

If you do want a refund, ma'am, I'd advise you to take the matter up with Central Office and not with me.

Trust me, they are beautiful rooms.

Notice the Beefeaters standing guard at the Palace gates with their fierce pikes and their mustaches. They get their name from the traditional beef-only diet. Yes, amazing as it may sound, they used to eat only beef. Beefeaters had a very high death-rate from colonic cancer.

Twice a day the guards change their positions to

avoid cramp. This is known as the Changing of the Guard.

Wait! Look! Up there! On the balcony! Why, the King and Queen have come out to wave at us! Wave back, everybody.

The King is wearing his crown. Remember the sign at the pub? The Queen, meanwhile, is wearing an elegant mid-length gown in taffeta with a lace hem and gold braid trim along the sleeves. To complete the ensemble, she wears a diamond tiaras and earrings and matching accessories. Ladies, don't you just wish you could dress as elegantly as that?

Oh, they're going in again. Goodbye, your majesties! Goodbye! Goodbye!

**W**e are now entering the Shakespeare sector. You can put down your bumbershoots now as the rain has been switched off. I know several of you have heard about the little difficulty we had in this sector some months back, but I am pleased to be able to tell you that the fire damage has been repaired and the tour can proceed as normal. However, please remember to observe the No Smoking rule at all times.

William Shakespeare was known as the Bard of Avon, a hereditary title handed down from one generation of bards to the next in the town of Avon, which was situated a few miles from London, capital city of Britworld™.

The Globe Theater was first constructed by USACorp Entertainments to the original specifications, but since the fire a number of alterations have been made, such as the use of steel and plastics instead of wood and plaster.

Let's go in.

Shhh. On the stage at this very moment a play is being performed. The play is "Macbeth," about a barbarian king who goes on a rampage of slaughter and mayhem before being brought to justice by his best friend. You've all seen the old Schwarzenegger movie.

"Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow."

We don't need to hear much more to get an idea of the genius of William Shakespeare's dialog.

And here, I'm sad to say, the tour ends. Before we leave via the exit marked "EXIT," may I say what a privilege and a pleasure it has been to show all of you the sights and sounds of Britworld™. As you will have seen, everything has been designed to the most rigorous of standards, including the automata, which incorporate a number of technological breakthroughs that allow for a wide range of facial expression, body odors, minor blemishes and deformities, even perspiration!

On behalf of USACorp Entertainments, I would like to thank you for accompanying me on the experience that was... Britworld™.

The following souvenirs are available at the merchandise kiosks: reproduction bric-a-brac; a Cockney phrase-book; Union Jack baseball caps; complete editions of the works of Sherlock Holmes and William Shakespeare, abridged and modernized; My Parents Went To Britworld™ And All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt T-shirts; foam-rubber crowns for the kids; the fabulous Jack the Ripper computer game (for all formats); and recordings in all formats of favorite Brit

world™ folksongs including "Strawberry Fields Forever," "Jerusalem," "God Save the King," and many many more. All major credit cards accepted.

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Have a nice day.

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James Lovegrove, born 1965, is the author of the futuristic horror novel *The Hope* (1990), praised by seemingly every organ from *20/20* magazine to the *Spectator* ("terrific verve, imagination and style," said Alan Sillitoe). He's currently completing a second book, as well as a fantasy novel in collaboration with Pete Crowther. He lives near Lewes, East Sussex, and the above piece is his first story for us.

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## Movie Novelizations

In our companion magazine *MILLION*, we are intending to run an article and bibliography on the history of that much-maligned species of fiction known as the "movie novelization" (i.e. book-length works of fiction based on scripts or scenarios for cinematic feature films). The novelization is far from being a new phenomenon – we've discovered that it dates back to 1914!

This is an appeal for information from readers who may be interested in the subject. Has anyone, anywhere, written anything on the history of film novelizations? Is there an existing bibliography – perhaps published in some collectors' fanzine? Our researches have revealed a complete lack of published information on the subject, other than reviews of particular works and anecdotal evidence gleaned from here and there.

As a starting point, I have listed some science-fiction movie novelizations on page 46 of this issue. A much larger bibliography, covering mainstream works as well as sf, fantasy and horror, will appear in due course in *MILLION*. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who thinks they can help. Please contact me at *Interzone's* main address.

– David Pringle

# Last of the Old Guard?

## Liz Holliday meets Arthur C. Clarke and his biographer, Neil McAleer

Depending on your point of view, Arthur C. Clarke is either a Grand Old Man of science fiction, or one of the genre's few remaining dinosaurs. It is almost an understatement to say that he is also well known as a science popularizer.

In fact, at the press conference he gave at the Science Museum in London recently, I was shocked to realize that the other journalists were almost all from the science pages of the national press. I was the only person who seemed at all interested in his fiction.

His visit to Britain, celebrating his 75th birthday, was marked by a week-long Space Festival in Minehead, his home town, as well as by the publication of his authorized biography, *Odyssey* by Neil McAleer (Gollancz, £16.99).

Clarke's mind is evidently much fitter than his body. Though he posed extensively for photographs – next to the Babbage Differential Engine, various satellite exhibits and the Lunar Landing Module – he had to be ferried from place to place in a wheelchair by his understandably protective brother, Fred. He started proceedings off by making a short speech:

**"I'm** absolutely delighted to be here, because this is the place I used to haunt in the days when I was a member of His Majesty's auditing department and living in Paddington at 21 Norfolk Square – the house is still there, I see – and on the weekends I used to wander across to this gallery, and the exhibit that used to fascinate me most was the Babbage Machine. I don't know why. I was interested in mathematics, but it's strange that of all the exhibits here, that's the one I most clearly remember. There was a whole mathematical instrument section: machines for doing mathematics. Little did I dream what that was going to start.

"So this place certainly had a tremendous impact on me. And I was delighted when it gave hospitality to that group of eccentrics, the British Interplanetary Society, and let us have a meeting room which was within a few metres of here. The old lift was up that side –" he gestures expansively – and immediately opposite was the

where we demonstrated the coelostat – we were never sure how to pronounce it! – which was a device to stabilize the sky, because we thought that spaceships had to be spun to give artificial gravity, you see. The small spaceship we were designing, optimistically, would have had to spin rather fast. So to unscramble the spinning sky we had to have a system of rotating mirrors, which we built and demonstrated using my cannibalized gramophone. We had to wind it up as I wound up the Babbage machine just now. Anyway, I wish that those old-timers could have seen all this –" and he gestures again, this time at the Lunar Landing Module and the satellite displays.

"Anyway, as you heard I'm here for the slightly premature celebration of my 75th birthday, which is on the 16th December. My brother Fred has arranged a marvellous exhibition in Minehead, my home town. He's had a lot of cooperation from industry and artists and there's some real Lunar rocks there, and moon dust. It was a great success, and I'm delighted that Minehead made me their first Freeman, which allows me to drive my sheep into the centre of town on market day.

"I've been here a month nearly, visiting Minehead and helping to publicize my biography. It was written by an American, Neil McAleer. He's done a terrific job, talking to many of my friends and a few of my enemies. But I feel rather sorry for poor Neil, because my career is beginning afresh.

"I feel ten years younger, partly because I've resumed diving again. I made my first hundred-foot dive, six miles out at sea – my first open-ocean dive in many years. I'm getting a decent dive boat at last, I hope, because I'm 100% operational underwater, only 20% operational on land. I took up diving, and got interested in the sea, entirely because of my interest in space, of course. I realized that underwater you could reproduce a pretty good analogy of weightlessness. So that's why I live in Sri Lanka.

"I also have another major book out, a book that will make me famous. It's called *How the World Was One*. It has the subtitle *Beyond the Global Village*, and that really sums up all the tele-

communications history, right up to the Gulf War. So it's kind of a double whammy this summer. On the book side, I've signed to do four more non-fiction books. The one I'm anxious to get back to work on is the one on terraforming and colonization of Mars. It has terrific pictures done on a programme called *Vistapro* on my Amiga 3000, which enables you to take the actual NASA contour maps of Mars and generate from them totally realistic landscapes, as if it was a colour camera looking at any point of view you like. Then you can modify them, and put in rivers, plants, trees; and in fact the subtitle of that is *A Garden on Mars*.

**"B**y a curious coincidence, this week NASA is doing something which I have written about: this tether experiment which I believe has been delayed a day or so because they've had a little trouble with Eureka, lowering like a yoyo from the space-shuttle. It's the first step towards building a space elevator from the Earth's surface." (As we now know, the experiment was a failure, since the tether failed to deploy.)

"I wrote a novel called *Fountains of Paradise*, which I hope will be filmed shortly. Now, I don't really know if the space elevator is practical. I'm sure it could be done one day with materials we will have, which already exist in the laboratory; but there are lots of other problems – not least that it would be quite a traffic hazard to have a tower going straight up from the equator to stationary orbit. But anyway I will be very interested to see what happens with this experiment, which may for all I know be starting right now, if they've got the Eureka stabilized. So, it gives me a strange feeling to see something I've written about in *Fountains of Paradise* – in 1977, I think – happening. I do describe the lowering of the cable from the geosynchronous orbit down to Earth.

"Now, just to round this off, I'm going back to wrap up the three or four books of my essays. I may have a major novel on my hands, I'm afraid. I can't say too much about this but I've brought off quite a coup. About two months ago *Time Magazine*, a small

periodical of which you may have heard, faxed me and said, 'We have never in our entire history published fiction – intentionally. Will you write us a 4,000-word story about the future?' This will be in a special issue of Time, the Millennium issue; probably 28th September; and it's going to shake everybody. So, I'm afraid the movie is inevitable and then they'll say 'Oh, write the damn book.'

'I've got several other things. I've got a piece on SETI coming up in *Life Magazine*, and that's another thing I'm really interested in, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence – is there anybody out there? Or, is there any evidence for this and when will we get it? If there is one wish I'd like to see granted in my lifetime it's proof of extra-terrestrial life, and better still, extra-terrestrial intelligence. A lot of people are now beginning to think there isn't any, because there has been absolutely no evidence, but I think it is rather premature to come to that conclusion when we're in a very primitive state of technology. We think we are clever with our radios, but radio may be abandoned after a few centuries of technology. Who knows what the big boys out there use to communicate with, if they indeed bother to do so? NASA is, in fact, starting a serious programme to search sometime in the next few months, and the *Life* piece is around that.

'I also have a piece coming up in the magazine that has published most of my technical pieces in the last 20 years – *Playboy*! As you may know, the first married couple is going up in the shuttle in a few months time, and this is why *Playboy* has commissioned a piece from me, which I have called 'NASA Sutra' – an old joke, but I think you'll enjoy that. So that's *Playboy*, *Life*, *Time*, and that's about it.'

**I**t should come as no surprise that *Odyssey: The Authorised Biography* is every bit as emotionally cool as Clarke's Science Museum speech. This is something I discussed at length with Clarke's biographer, Neil McAleer, before the press conference.

But first things first: how does one get to be a biographer of someone as famous as Clarke? 'I was in between projects, and in July 1988 Arthur was in Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland, getting a full checkup on his physical condition, which was deteriorating. A London doctor made a – incorrect, thank God! – diagnosis of Lou Gehrig's, a terminal disease. He was over there for the biopsy and full testing, and when he was recovering from that he got the good news that it was post-polio syndrome, which was treatable and manageable with appropriate therapies, and that he would survive and had a good many working years left. You know his ambition now

is that he wants to live to see 2001, as we all want him to.

'I had approached him through an old friend, Fred Durant, who he had met in 1951. He put me together with Arthur, and we discussed it. He wouldn't make an absolute commitment, but we seemed to get along quite well. I had won a similar award that he had won in '65, the Robert S. Bolt Memorial Award that the Aviation and Space Writers' association gave out in the United States. That gave me reason to wire him, to say that I had evoked his name in my acceptance speech, that I had heard he was not well, and congratulated him on various new books and so forth; and he had written back to me. So we met at Chevy Chase, Maryland, and I proposed an oral biography based on interviews. He agreed, and gave me a contact list of well over 200 names, and so that got me started. It amounted to about 200 interviews with his friends and fellow writers and so forth.

'The mechanics of the interviewing and the transcriptions, of course, are very labour-intensive. I have over 7,000 hours, of which about 25% was cut. You just don't know what you are going to find until you get there – what did he do in London in 1962, let's say: Where was he? Who was he with? I did put all of that up on the screen, that basic research, because I thought there might be some patterns emerging. And there were, ultimately, but as much in his work as in his actual biography.'

I was interested in whether McAleer chose to write such an emotionally restrained book, or whether he was constrained to – it is, after all, an authorized biography – something many critics feel may be a limiting factor. Clarke even says he has 35 personal journals hidden in an iron box which are not to be opened until 50 years after his death:

'I would not have felt comfortable dealing with the intimacies. I tried to cover it upfront. The tease upfront about all these words in the iron box is true, certainly. I personally wouldn't have felt comfortable doing an unauthorized biography of a living person. Plus, Arthur is a man of ideas. Arthur is, in a sense, wedded to his work. The little that I did know about his personal life...there really is very little that I know that I did not put into the work as such. He is a man of ideas, and I think that's how he will be remembered. That's the important part of his life and I don't know if his personal relationships would be important to interpreting or understanding his work.'

'I was thankful to be off the hook, in a sense. There would have been a lot of legal problems, you know? – with relationships with living people that are past, and so on. So I'm comfortable with it.'

**I**nteresting enough – especially for Clarke completists – the US edition differs from the British one: 'There's a little tidbit that's quite funny. The US edition is quite different – it has different chapter titles, different epigraphs, there's the occasion where we took some Cronkite material out, because he's a big name in the US but not so in Britain. There's about a 10% difference here. Arthur, for example, said he was a virgin with women when he was first married, and he would have been in his thirties. He said this quite late on, and I plugged it into the US edition. The fact it was his first experience with women and he was thirty is pretty amazing to someone of our age. But he never denied anything: I was being the censor, if at all. I didn't want to get into his intimate sexual life, knowing that he would probably object. I really felt that the advantages of having his cooperation, and the fact that his family would offer up early correspondence and material I could draw on quite heavily, made it a far better life at this point, while he's still alive, than a couple of little stories could.'

In fact, Clarke's emotions and sexuality are skimmed over. Near the beginning his short-lived marriage is skated over very quickly. Towards the end, a reference to bisexuality in the novel 2010 gives McAleer the chance to hint quite heavily that Clarke is bisexual, but this lasts less than a page: 'I took off from the *Playboy* interview. The question of Arthur Clarke's sexuality may be interesting to some people but I'm certainly more interested in his ideas. The man is married to his work.'

McAleer seemed surprised both that I hadn't known Clarke was bisexual and that I thought he might have talked about it earlier in the work. Myself, I would have thought that at least part of the purpose of doing a biography of a writer is to illuminate the work; and I don't see how you can leave sexuality out of it, as McAleer came very close to doing. Possibly it is less pertinent if one is considering the life of a scientist or science writer, and as that is McAleer's basic interest in Clarke he may not have realized that some of us regard the man first and foremost as a science-fiction writer.

Certainly he feels that the pervasive emotional coolness is a comment on Clarke: 'Ultimately, that reflects Arthur and his work. I mean, you know that he has been criticized for under-characterization and not being able to deal with emotion. It's rare that you find emotional statements in the work of Arthur C. Clarke. You certainly do in *Songs of Distant Earth*. He's dealing with feelings of grief there. He's felt grief in his own life, with the loss of the young son-substitute, Leslie, and so on.'





Arthur C. Clarke with Babbage's Difference Engine

Despite the fact that his main interest obviously lies in Clarke's non-fiction, McAleer does make some astute observations about Clarke's fiction. There is, for instance, the recurring motif of the father-son relationship: "It's almost a cliché, but I think it's very true with Arthur. It's easy to find in his work, and I do give several examples of that. He lost his father at thirteen, and it's not as if the father had a very strong presence to the age of thirteen. The fact is that he really didn't, and then he had none at all after thirteen. The father was very ailing and sickly and in bed often. Both the older brothers – not Michael, but Arthur and Fred – practically have no memory of the father. That's not to say they didn't have other father-figures in the family, because they did have uncles, but the year Arthur lost his father he found one of his major literary influences: Stapledon. He talks about a cosmic consciousness, he talks about the Overmind, about a universal sentience. As an idea, Clarke has used this throughout his work. I personally feel that the age of thirteen was extremely important for Arthur Clarke, relative to the loss of his father."

So, here we have a possible cause of one of Clarke's paradoxes: that he, a self-styled "aggressive agnostic" is constantly writing about humanity and the transcendental (think of *Childhood's End*, the close of 2001, "The

Star" and so on). Says McAleer: "He goes out of his way to play this up. There was one instance where this Jesuit priest, Father Lubbers, was meeting him for the first time, and he struggled across the room to him. And Arthur said, 'I'm an atheist!' He went out of his way to do that, and yet on the other hand, Brian Aldiss has said about his work – about his famous short stories 'The Star' and 'Nine Billion Names of God,' that you have this conflict. He's looking for faith. I think he really has a faith in the future of the human race. Yet on the other hand, the faith in traditional religious institutions he will turn his back to, so to speak. Most people would say, I think, that he is religious in a very large sense, seeking answers to questions. Yet again, from a science-fiction point of view, it's the knowledge that is all-important and not the faith."

Later McAleer went on to say: "Eric Rabkin, the Clarke scholar, considers *Rendezvous with Rama* and 2001 to be Arthur's two best books, in that they kind of put humanity in the context of insignificance in terms of the total cosmic scheme. I felt that was a very important and telling perspective on Arthur's work."

Knowledge, of course, is where Clarke really comes into his own. After all, outside the sf community, he's really best known as a science writer. In some ways this is problematic:

fiction may date, but it can always be seen in the context of its period; old science writing is, often, simply wrong. Though Clarke has updated much of his early work, a lot is out of print. For this reason, McAleer had difficulty tracking some things down. "His science-fact writing – much of it was out of print and was difficult to find. *The Coast of Coral*, and the books that came out of his Great Barrier Reef days when he went to Australia and Ceylon for the first time in the mid-1950s and the early 1960s, were out of print. I had to go to one of the state libraries in the US to find them. I found one or two here and there, but even so I'm not in possession of all his books."

"He more or less decided, I think it was in the 1970s after the tremendous success of 2001, that he would cut back on his non-fiction and concentrate on fiction. He just looked at the fact that all of his fiction was in print but several of his non-fiction pieces were not. Now, *Profiles of the Future* is still in print. It's had a new edition and a new afterword and foreword, and he pays great attention to all this; including – and I never quite traced this completely – but even his dedications changed over time. One of the first dedications to Marilyn [Clarke's ex-wife] was moved. His good friend Val Cleaver shared a dedication with her, and then it became strictly to Val Cleaver. In one way this strikes me as

being good, because it shows that he's willing to change over time, even the personal side of his life, though to me a dedication would be sacrosanct."

**D**espite this, Clarke remains one of the few sf writers to have predicted anything. McAleer asked him what he thought he would be remembered for: "He more or less said that he didn't know, but he figured that the *Wireless World* article, and his prediction of a geosynchronous system of global communications for humankind on planet Earth, would at least be a footnote for the century."

One of the things science fiction can – or maybe even *should* – aspire to is to extrapolate not just technology, but the changes in people and societies which arise from that development. Despite the fact that Clarke is, perhaps, as far from the "people" end of science fiction as it is possible to get, he has made one or two social predictions in his fiction. As early as 1960, in his story "I Remember Babylon," he suggested that satellites would one day be used to transmit pornography, a problem currently being faced in this country as in many others: "When I asked him about that – and I think we have a slight difference in the text in the US edition – he didn't imply he was necessarily against it (laughs), but that he might actually enjoy it. 'Licking my chops,' he said, which is one of his expressions."

But affecting the world can come in many guises, and so can influencing the rest of the sf field. "Profiles of the Future" was very influential on Gene Roddenberry. Gene's first *Star Trek* series had just failed. He was a failure. He was going to lose his home and his life insurances and the whole thing. He claimed that when he went to hear Arthur speak in Arizona – just prior to Apollo 11, which would have been approximately 1969, I guess – Arthur said "Hold on, it's all going to change in a few years with the American space programme and the Russians." And he put Roddenberry in touch with his lecture agent and that apparently turned Roddenberry around, with the very enthusiastic college and university audience."

And then there is the effect that the rest of the world has had on the writer. One of the most telling criticisms of Clarke – which has also been made of many other writers of his generation – is that his work is less developed in terms of characterization than in some other elements. Clarke has tried to overcome this in his later work, with a greater or lesser degree of success. I wondered if this was a response to criticism, a straight commercial decision, or maybe just Clarke's development as a writer?

"The collaborations aside, I would suggest we might be talking more about

*The Songs of Distant Earth*, perhaps? There is a relationship which is better drawn there. From a biographical point of view, I would say he felt grief and he felt he should deal with grief; and he dealt with it in that book.

"He's certainly aware of the criticism – 'yeah, they always say that' – and he wanted to stop the criticism. You know, if somebody says, 'You don't draw characters well, Arthur,' well there's always Lester Del Rey to quote, 'yes, but he draws the race of man well.' There's truth in that. He wanted to do better. He wanted to improve. He doesn't like criticism. Who the hell does? It doesn't matter who you are or how many accolades or awards you might get.

"The worst reviews I've ever seen have not been against Arthur but against the collaborations, and about false advertising and using the Clarke name. That sort of thing."

**T**he whole question about why someone of Clarke's stature would take on a collaborator at all is one that should be of great interest to the sf community: after all more and more big names are doing it, or leasing out their universes to sharecroppers: "Well first of all, he's at a point in his life where he doesn't want to work too hard. He doesn't have that kind of energy any more. Secondly, he liked Gentry Lee – but then he likes a lot of people."

Having interviewed Larry Niven and Steven Barnes, I know that there are advantages for the junior partner in a collaboration: Barnes told me that it gave him a lot of exposure and moved his career along nicely without hindering his own work at all. The case of Gentry Lee is different, though: he wasn't a writer before he started working with Clarke. "He gets criticized a lot for that – from people who are struggling writers that are trying to get their work out. Then again, Gentry may have earned his money with all the criticism he's had."

McAleer is, understandably, wary of saying too much more on this subject; and so at the last we come almost full circle: "I wish I could have made the Clarke biography better. What I would have done would have been to have, if not a Stapledonian perspective, a Clarkeian perspective of a hundred years. I mean, let's hope for the best: Arthur Clarke dies in 2012 at 95; I write the book in 2062. I have at least a fifty-year perspective. It would have been a more difficult job than this, I think. The fact is that I had his cooperation and his papers; but what pleases me is that I did capture these people before they're gone."

## SF MOVIE NOVELIZATIONS

Here is a very brief, select list of science-fiction novels based on scripts or scenarios for feature films. (See our note on the subject of movie novelizations, page 42.)

*Metropolis* by Thea von Harbou (1926)

*King Kong* by Delos W. Lovelace (1932)

*The Bride of Frankenstein* by Michael Egremont (Michael Harrison, 1936)

*Dr Cyclops* by Will Garth (Manly Wade Wellman, 1940)

*Riders to the Stars* by Curt Siodmak & Robert Smith (1953)

*Forbidden Planet* by W.J. Stuart (1956)

*Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* by Theodore Sturgeon (1961)

*Fantastic Voyage* by Isaac Asimov (1966)

*2001: A Space Odyssey* by Arthur C. Clarke (1968)

*Beneath the Planet of the Apes* by Michael Avallone (1970)

*Star Wars* by George Lucas (Alan Dean Foster, 1976)

*Alien* by Alan Dean Foster (1979)

*E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* by William Kotzwinkle (1982)

*RoboCop* by Ed Naha (1987)

*The Abyss* by Orson Scott Card (1989)

*Terminator 2: Judgment Day* by Randall Frakes (1991)

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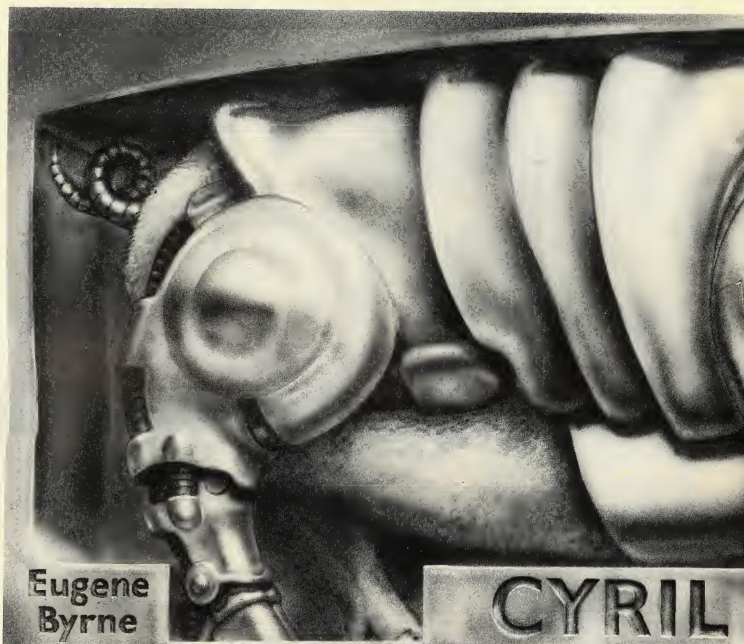


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**O**kay Cyril, I want you to take all this down and store it. If you fall into the hands of the authorities, you are to repeat this to them. Got it?

Good.

The beginning. Lordy, where's the beginning? I don't know. Something like this...

Back around the turn of the century, when taxpayers' money was still being chucked at anything with an "ach," "ll" or "ff" in it, I worked at an animation company in Cardiff, turning out unimaginative kids' stuff in Welsh. They were nice people, but I was getting restless.

Then I bumped into Maria at the Cardiff International Animation Festival. She and I had been part of the same crowd at university. Though we hadn't met in years, I sometimes read about her in the trade press – she was at a London house, fast becoming the queen of the tasteful sanitary-towel advert. We hung out together at the Fest and halfway through her boyfriend James, an account manager for one of the big ad agencies, showed up. We stayed up late and talked a lot of shop.

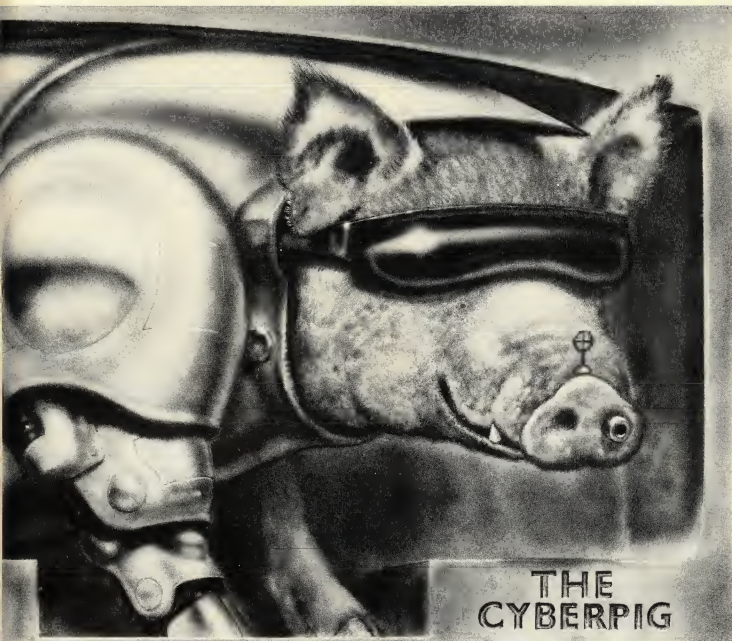
That's when we decided to form Jam Productions. It made sense; Maria is a ferociously gifted designer and artist, I would cover the electronics and James is a charismatic salesman who never needs to resort to bullshit or insincerity.

They wanted out of London, I wanted to leave Cardiff, so we set up in Bristol, a small place but one which was already home to several successful animators, so the talent and the support services would be available.

Two years on, we were doing okay, thanks to James finding the work – mainly in advertising – and stopping us from spending the proceeds too fast. One day, he mentioned that Penn & Warburton, the big confectionery company, were in the market for an animated kids' series to sponsor on satellite and cable.

I went home that evening, a Saturday, shagged out after 15 days' solid work on a cinema ad for Greene's Gin. I slumped into the sofa and turned on the TV. They were showing Robocop 2 on the Classic Movie Channel. I'd already seen it, but was too tired even to pick up the remote and switch it.





## THE CYBERPIG

The film was long over when I awoke. Now they were showing some daft thing from the 1970s, all Afro hair and loon pants. One of the characters referred to the police as "pigs."

I picked up the phone at one in the morning. By 1.15 I had convinced James and Maria that we should make a pilot of my idea.

**T**o earn his keep, Cyril the Cyberpig had to be really cheap. Our only chance was to make story and characters as interesting as possible. Cyril, half-pig and half-machine, was a wiseacre crime-fighter. His arch-enemy was Doctor Obnoxor, a fairly shameless ripoff of Dick Dastardly, a cartoon character nobody remembers any more. Obnoxor was my favourite (and the kids', too); a sneering swine who, in between attempts at world conquest, indulged in wholly gratuitous acts of petty sadism. The annoyingly cheerful Cyril spoke in a sort of Cockney argot, rolled around in mud a lot and liked eating the most disgusting combinations of food we could think of (Marmite Black Forest Gateau, haddock

boiled in Lucozade... you get the idea).

Maria leapt a hand, but it was mainly my baby. I did the sketches, wrote the script, moused up the cels and made them move. The children of friends, relatives and complete strangers were systematically kidnapped to test audience reaction and, in between regular work, I turned the pilot around in two months, largely by not sleeping very much.

James lunched all the right people, Penn & Warburton bought it, and we went into regular production. In a few months, it was showing in 15 different countries, including the US and Japan. Cyril the Cyberpig wasn't nearly as successful at this point as he was to become when he passed out of our hands, but he was honest toil, and by the time we contracted for the third series, the trade press was saying that Jam Productions was on its way.

We never suspected that at that moment, our little partnership was being discussed in the boardroom of the world's fifth-largest corporation.

The Longman-Bertorelli-Mayer Group owned Penn & Warburton. They had all kinds of other interests,

mainly in media and leisure, and now they planned to open a huge theme park near Paris.

It was to be called Mondo Future – cod-Esperanto coined by the marketing drones to get the meaning across in as many lingoes as possible – a complex of hotels, restaurants and media- and science-based attractions. It would be taking Disney head-on; while it was the same kind of junk-folk funfair, they claimed it would be more “educational” and more “European” than its competitor, which is like saying that french fries are better for you than cheeseburgers.

Attractions at Mondo Future were to be based on the Group's media holdings. Though he was sponsored by one of their companies, they didn't have the rights to Cyril, and they probably wouldn't have bothered with him, but – I'm speculating here – some pushy young suit with an MBA saw an article in *New Scientist* about neural interface technology and had an idea.

Why not make Cyril the Cyberpig for real? Why not take a pig, replace half his brain with a fifth-generation computer, put a voice simulator in his throat, build a machine-gun into his snout, armour-plate half his body, give him a stainless steel front leg with various useful attachments and an artificial back leg with a mule's kick?

The technology existed. On paper, it looked possible.

We knew none of this at the time. What we did know was that Longman-Bertorelli-Mayer were offering us ten million Ecus for the whole Cyril, oink and all. We assumed they wanted to broaden Cyril's market potential with bigger promotion, merchandise and perhaps feature films. They also hinted that they wanted to go virtual with him; after all, Mondo Future was sure to have loads of virtual 'toon booths.

Cyril had been good to us, but ten million eeks was a sight gooder. With no hesitation whatever, we sold. I bought a house in Clifton, James and Maria finally married and bought a big house, and Maria and I bought loads of new Japanese toys. The business flourished. Better still, I had recently started going out with a Media Studies lecturer called Carol; this was the big one – we were spending a lot of time getting doe-eyed in front of log fires and going for long walks hand in hand. If I could freeze-frame my life, it would be then.

**T**he way I hear it, 50 pigs died in secret labs in Switzerland before a fully functioning Cyril was led out at a press conference in Paris to mark the launch of Mondo Future.

The talking pig generated all the expected publicity. Some said it was cruel and immoral to interfere with poor defenceless animals in this way. They were right – but if a talking pig tells you it's never been happier, that it has no problems with the fact that a whole bunch of perfectly viable organs have been yanked out to make way for machinery, and that it's thrilled to bits to be a lead player in the theme park of the 21st century, what do you do? Tell it that it's just a dumb animal and that humans know what's best for it?

So the moral issue becomes sufficiently blurred to open a path of least resistance along which money will most surely travel.

I have a tape of the conference, which was held in English, the international language of greed. The astonished journalists raised the cruelty issue pretty quickly.

“Lissen,” says the pig, standing on a raised platform between a bunch of lobotomized, plastic-smiling Mondo Future suits, “you can't tell me I've been treated badly if you've ever eaten pork – 'cos that's the only use pigs are to you lot otherwise. There ain't many people keep pigs as pets. Tell you something else – once you've got talking pigs, you're gonna think twice about eating them, ain't you? I could be the best thing that's happened to my species since the Law of Moses. Oinkee oinkeel!”

His mouth moves in synch with the voice box. He's very credible, and has this luvverly London accent, just like his cartoon forebear. “People are gonna say that I'm just some kind of gimmick, a circus act. It's true I have to earn my keep by entertaining the guests at Mondo Future. But the same is true of everyone in this room. We all got a job to do.”

The hacks are nodding “good point.”

Now comes the coup de grâce: “If you don't respect me, that's all right. I can live with that 'cos I know that I'm going to make a lot of people – 'specially kids – happy. But the really important thing is this; the scientists have learnt a lot developing me, and that knowledge will benefit the whole of mankind.”

Pure pigshit – but the way Cyril was talking, he represented the end of all human misery. His implants, nanotechnology, anti-rejection systems, his revolutionary blood-sugar energy plant and sense/command interfaces promised a future in which the blind would see, the lame would walk and even the irredeemably stupid would cast away Sky Television.

But the press won't let him off just yet. They want to know whether this is really him talking, or if his control computer has been programmed to fend off such questions. And if it really is him talking does he mean it, or is he just saying his lines because there's a pork butcher sharpening his knives backstage if he fluffs it?

Cyril goes into a long talk about how that part of his brain which controls his motor functions is still there, and how it's linked to an artificial brain controlling speech, sensory responses and suite upon suite of memory/reaction software to act out his role in the theme park and ask for anything he wants.

So, says a reporter, that means your previous responses to our questions about the morality of artificially altering pigs were pre-programmed.

“You gotta remember I'm a pig,” says Cyril. “My everyday concerns are different from yours. Pigs don't deal in abstract reasoning. But that don't mean I don't believe what I said...”

Got that? He's admitted he's been programmed to talk crap, then contradicts himself. Everyone's confused.

A TV reporter jumps up. “Cyril, do you have a, um, girlfriend...uh, someone special in your life?” I'm sure it's no coincidence that this woman, who has steered the press away from an embarrassing area, works for one of the networks owned by Longman-Bertorelli-Mayer.

Cyril says something about not having had much time for courting lately. He's been busy going through

exactly the same customer welcome course that all team-members at Mondo Future have been through.

This was about two years after LBM had bought the rights to Cyril. Cyril in the flesh (pork?) was just as much a surprise to us as he was to the reptiles of the world's media. When I first saw this on the TV news, I was fascinated, but didn't feel as though it had much to do with me. I still didn't until a few days later when a friend at CNN's London bureau sent me the tape of the full conference.

It's towards the end, and a Dutch newspaperman won't let go of the moral thing.

"Cyril, do you believe in God?" says the guy. Some of the other journalists look irritably at him. This isn't the angle they're interested in.

"I believe in Christian values," said Cyril, "of law and order, of people helping one another, of family life and personal morality." One or two cynics snigger.

"But who created you, Cyril? How did you get here?" says the Dutchman.

"My creator is Andrew Davies," said Cyril. "He is a British animator who first came up with the idea of Cyril the Cyberpig. He made the first drawings, and he was responsible for my early cartoons on TV."

**I** got to calling it The Argument. At parties, receptions, in the pub, discussion with friends and strangers alike would eventually turn to Cyril.

They'd say it was terrible to interfere with a pig in this way.

I agreed.

They said it was a sick charade to make money for a bloated capitalist concern that didn't give a toss about ordinary people.

I agreed.

They said it was propaganda for the vivisection industry and wouldn't advance human medicine one iota.

I agreed.

They said that the military-industrial complex was probably behind it and that whole armies of soldier-Cyrils were being bred right now and that the old balance of nuclear terror would be replaced by a balance of Cyril terror.

I agreed.

So if you agree, they would say, why did you let them do it?

I would try to explain that, having sold the rights, we had no control over Cyril at all. We weren't even making the bloody TV cartoons any more (these had been put out to a sweatshop in Poland). The ruder ones would say that I had sold out my principles for money, adding that I should try and get the rights back. As if I wanted to commit all I owned to a case I would almost certainly lose. I went right off intellectuals, idealists, greens, vegetarians, liberals and socialists at that point. The trendy novelist Daniel Concannon – whom I have never met – wrote an article in one of the Sunday papers naming me as the living Englishman he most despised, because I hadn't spoken out against Mondo Future's outrageous violation of nature. In between getting most of his facts about me wrong, he suggested that I would happily connive at vivisection of babies if I could secure a regular supply of fresh ones.

What really hurt was that Carol couldn't decide whether she was my girlfriend or a Media Studies lecturer. She understood that there was nothing I could legally do about Cyril, but she kept on at me to publicly denounce him, to take some kind of stand. One of our rows ended with us not speaking for two weeks.

With fifty different flavours of idiot inviting me to flush my career down the toilet, pure pig-headedness (sorry) decided me to say nothing. If someone's mugging you in a back alley, do you tell them that you fully understand their point of view?

Meanwhile, Cyril had become a major international celebrity. The tabloid papers and moron TV stations were giving away tickets to Mondo Future in competitions, running their Cyril the Cyberpig clubs for the kids (and the students and squaddies of course), and doling out thousands of Cyril T-shirts and pairs of Trotter trainers. What I hated most were those car-horns that went "oinkee oinkee!" I even saw a bumper-sticker once that said "OINK IF YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN."

However much the chattering classes fretted, ordinary folk, particularly their children, loved Cyril. He was the star attraction at Mondo Future, repaying the investment in him quite handsomely, what with the animated series and all the merchandise – the Pig Out lunchboxes, the comic (Porkies) and the appalling Cyril's Swill range of novelty foods (tuna and strawberry pizzas, for Chrissakes! Vegan Cybersausages!). When everyone thought it could get no bigger, the feature film came out. Cyril Saves the World starring Cyril himself, and with Alan Rickman as Dr Obnoxor, broke box office records everywhere. It was, I gladly admit, a slick, very funny film that made both children and adults laugh by not taking itself at all seriously.

Just as all my friends had got tired of picking on me, the Great Mondo Future Massacre took place.

**T**here must have been at least 2,000 people with palmcoders and microcoders there that afternoon. CNN scooped up footage from 35 of them as a job-lot. I've seen it all.

The cartoon Cyril had a built-in machinegun, the barrel of which poked out of his snout. The strict rule was that Cyril would only fire in self-defence and would never actually hit anyone; the last thing you want in a children's cartoon sponsored by a sweetie company is blood and guts all over the shop. Which is a shame, really, because that's precisely what the kids want; but I digress.

When they built Cyril, they installed a Heckler & Koch machine pistol surrounded by a clever insulating system to stop the gun's heat turning him to rashes from the inside. Magazines would be inserted under his neck, which was also where you'd find the cocking-lever. Naturally, Cyril only ever fired blank propellant.

When he wasn't appearing on TV chat shows or making movies, Cyril worked at Mondo Future in a full-sized replica of the Roman Colosseum. Three times a day, he'd do a show in which he chased a bunch of bad guys led by the evil Dr Obnoxor, climaxing in a shoot-out; they'd fire at him, he'd roll around and take cover, shout witty defiance, and pop off at

them with his gun. They would then try and get away in a car, which he would charge side-on. Half a ton of armour-plated ham would easily knock the car over, and he'd round up the scum and hand them over to the police before settling down to a celebratory roll in the mud, followed by a meal of curried turnips in chocolate.

It would take me ages to work out how to tell the background story. So here's a cutting from a feature about the episode in the *Independent* on Sunday.

"The real villain was not Cyril, but Xavier Kellerman, aged 19, one of a team of people who looked after the pig.

"For those working there, Mondo Future is a small community, with all the intense, petty passions that go with it. Kellerman was devastated when his girlfriend, Heloise Fabre, threw him over for Dieter Model, the 25-year-old who played Dr Obnoxor in the Colosseum three times a day. Fabre probably considered the more mature actor a better catch than a teenage swineherd.

"The show was very tightly scripted; ad-libbing was a sacking offence. In the act, Model was the first person Cyril fired his gun at, and this is where Kellerman saw his chance. Visiting his parents in Brussels one weekend, Kellerman went into an underworld bar and bought a clip of live ammunition to fit the gun. Back at work, he replaced a magazine of blanks with it while nobody was looking.

"This was not the stuff of which perfect murders are made. The youth said later that he was insane with hurt and jealousy; he did not care what happened to him later and, no, he agreed that he had not had the guts to have it out with Model man-to-man. Besides, there was always a chance, no matter how slight, that he might get away with it."

That afternoon, the show started as normal. The bad guys went through their bank-robbery routine, and then, to uproarious applause, Cyril entered. On one of the tapes, you can already see the group of yobs at the front knocking back the beers and acting like idiots. In close up, you can clearly see the Union Jack t-shirts, the sweaty faces, the tattooed foreheads, the short hair, the broken teeth...

There are six of them, but they're making enough noise for 50. Now one of them, his shirt dangling from the back of his shorts, gets on top of the low wall in front of them and faces in towards the crowd. Like an orchestra conductor, he leads the chorus...

"Nice one, Cyril! Nice one, son!..."

A couple of people further back gesture him to sit down and shut up. Others visibly flinch away, not wanting to fall foul of *les hooligans*. Over to the left, a man in a red t-shirt is speaking into a radio. A couple of other red t-shirts appear at the top of the crowd. One points towards the lads.

The guy on the wall falls backwards, dead drunk, flopping into the dirt right in front of Cyril. His mates laugh and jeer and start throwing beer cans at both him and Cyril. One hits Cyril on the nose; it doesn't just bounce off, but thuds to the ground. It must have been almost full.

One of the lads stands and holds up a half-eaten hot-dog and, quite clearly, says "Ere, look, Cyril! Pork! I'm eating pig! Might be your mum!"

The others collapse in laughter. The red t-shirts are now coming at them from the top of the auditorium, and from either side with such grim purpose that you know they aren't going to get their money back.

Just what is going through Cyril's head isn't clear, but something in there cracks. He turns towards the main group of hooligans, who are all standing now, and he fires.

The noise isn't the stutter you expect with a machine-gun. The thing he's got shoots so quickly that it sounds more like tearing cloth, and it's very quiet; most of the noise is masked inside Cyril's bulk. The magazine is empty in a few seconds.

Two of the yobs have been virtually cut in half, a third has the top of his head sliced off like an egg. The others, aside from the one who fell into the sand a moment before, are seriously injured.

A woman seated behind them is grazed in the thigh by a bullet; it's a miracle that no other innocent bystanders were killed. People scream, people groan, others stand open-mouthed, unable to take in what's happened. Children cry, men and women in red t-shirts yell obscenities into radios in four different languages.

**E**ven I got hauled in. I was flown to Paris to meet the *juge d'instruction*, the investigating magistrate, Théodore Soustelle, who wanted to talk to anyone who might assist in apportioning blame fairly. By then, he knew that Xavier Kellerman had slipped Cyril the live ammunition in an attempt to assassinate Dieter Model. In his immaculate English, he cheerfully disclosed that the police had already beaten the crap out of Kellerman, and that by pleading *crime passionnel*, he would almost certainly be out of prison inside ten years, if not five.

Soustelle was far more interested in Cyril's guilt.

Cyril had always acted out his script to the letter, but on the one occasion he happened to be loaded with live ammunition, he turned on some members of his audience and shot them. The machine part of Cyril's brain had been programmed with more or less the personality which I had originally conceived, and it was about this that Soustelle quizzed me. I explained that Cyril was a cartoon character and had some amusingly disgusting habits, but his *métier* was to fight crime and injustice, to protect the weak and to use his weapon only in self-defence.

"So, Mr Davies," he said, "which part of Cyril's mind do you believe urged him to shoot the hooligans? The pig's brain, or the artificial one? If the pig is guilty, we will have him killed as a dangerous animal. If the computer is guilty, then we will have to prosecute Mondo Future..."

I couldn't know the answer. It appeared, I said, that the pig itself was guilty. I had not created a cartoon character prone to violent over-reaction, and I was sure that the Mondo Future biotechs never intended to construct something which might damage business by damaging customers.

Soustelle nodded, pursed his lips and shook my hand.

The French adore a good argument, and here was one *de premier cru*.

Some said the owners of Mondo Future were patently guilty of the deaths because they had manu-



factured Cyril. A prominent bande-desinée artist said that he felt a powerful empathy with Cyril's cartoon creators, who could not possibly have foreseen the monster that vulgar consumer capitalism would create. He urged all cartoonists and animators to legally insulate their work from such brutal phillistinism.

Others said Cyril's only sin was to lash out in anger against a bunch of English hooligans, which was hardly a crime at all. Perhaps he could be employed as a sort of honorary cop.

A newspaper columnist headlined an article "J'Accuse" and lambasted the entire French establishment for making Cyril a scapegoat for the maladies in French society – the break-up of family life, loss of sovereignty to the EC, street-crime, bad driving and the declining quality of table wine. Their hypocrisy, he said, would be complete if they could only send Cyril to Devil's Island.

A leftist politician said Cyril represented a sick hybrid of violent machismo and capitalist repression, the product of a value system which held that problems can be solved simply by having a machine-gun up your nose. This, he postulated, was an American conceit and, since the earliest days of Hollywood, America had screwed up the rest of the world by pretending there's an easy answer to everything. A criminal? Shoot him dead. Short of money? Go and work hard. Fallen out with your Mom? Have a cup of coffee and a hug. They were French first, he said, then Europeans, and in any event definitely not Americans. The best thing to do was make a bonfire of Mondo Future and spit-roast Cyril on the top.

In the middle of all this, Théodore Soustelle, either a courageous man, or (more likely) a gleeful troublemaker in the finest French tradition, gave the answer few wanted to hear. He was convinced that the Mondo Future management had done all they could to create a safe and reliable Cyril, that the pig's own brain had decided to waste the yobs, and since this was the first time Cyril had ever deviated from his script, he did so knowing he was carrying live rounds. Soustelle recommended that the EC consider banning the production and use of cyborg animals as a matter of urgency. He was also applying for Cyril to be humanely put down as dangerous and uncontrollable.

An international pressure group called The Friends of Cyril had already formed; volunteers co-ordinated press campaigns and rattled collecting tins in the streets. Mercifully, the projected Cyril Aid concert at Wembley never happened, but several musical has-beens revived their careers when they recorded the nauseating *A Prayer for Cyril*, which topped the charts for six weeks. Personally I preferred the thrash-metal band Noise Annoys' pastiche of the old Paul McCartney/Stevie Wonder song, *Ebony and Ivory and Ham* which didn't even make the top hundred.

Britain's tabloid papers hesitated, then acted decisively. On the not-disproved assumption that their readers were all xenophobic animal-lovers, they took the line that the tragic deaths of some high-spirited lads was the fault of Mondo Future, not the pig. The French, they said, should not be allowed to execute an innocent animal in cold blood. This led to headlines like **DON'T LET CYRIL BE A FRENCH FRY!, BRING HOME CYRIL'S BACON!**, the surreal IT'S



THE FROGS WHO ARE THE PIGS and the scary NUKE THE BASTARDS! – TORY MP.

The Friends of Cyril amassed a formidable war-chest which could have been spent on a million more deserving causes. They hired the sharpest lawyers in Europe to fight Soustelle's decision. After all, the Napoleonic Code is pretty ambiguous about the machine-gunning of English yobs by pigs.

Meanwhile, all my nice educated friends held their noses and jumped into the ideological cess-pit with the scum press. The same people who had previously been hassling me to denounce the Cyberpig were now whining about how I should make a public appeal for Cyril's life to be spared.

No way!

If they killed the pig, they would kill the movies, the TV series, the merchandise, the disgusting food... If they did all that, I would have peace and quiet once more. I wanted Cyril dead, dead, dead! Call me vindictive if you want, but hey, I'd rarely been so in touch with my true feelings.

Even Carol wanted me to beg for mercy. But when I told her about my true feelings, she called me a selfish, cynical coward. At the climax of her rage, she called me a pig. That cracked me up. I couldn't help it. I collapsed in tears of laughter. Two minutes later, she walked out.

I re-examined my true feelings.

Yep! I still wanted the Cyberpig to go the way of the dodo. More than ever now that he had come between me and the woman I loved.

Despite what the British papers said, few in France wanted Cyril dead either. There, he had attained the status of Joan of Arc, Alfred Dreyfus, and Napoleon all mixed up. So his precise location was kept secret.

Actually, he was at a naval barracks in Toulon.

**A**ction Verte are hardliners; no namby-pamby monkey-wrenching or tree-hugging for them. These paladins of the planet have killed those who violate the earth for profit.

As to how they found out where Cyril was, I have a theory.

Cyril embarrassed the French establishment, who wanted him out of the way. At the same time, nobody hates environmental activists more than the French secret services – it's a fine old tradition that goes way back to the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior. Fifty grand to a handful of pigshit bets that the cloak-and-dagger boys leaked Cyril's whereabouts to Action Verte, hoping they'd try and spring him. The spooks would wait, then have a nice gun battle in which a group of terrorists would be productively slaughtered without any annoying paperwork, and in which Cyril would (tragically) die in the crossfire. *Quel dommage!*

One of the greenshirt cells took the bait and decided to rescue Cyril in the name of animal rights.

For what happened next, I have had to rely on newspaper reports. Certain details may be wrong, but there's no doubting the basic facts.

Remember that Brother Gaul still has to do his national service. A lot of these kids would much rather be doing something else and some, young and idealistic, sympathize with Action Verte. Two such were to prove vital in Cyril's escape, giving the terrorists a map of the base, precise instructions as to

where they would find him, and suggesting a way of sneaking in.

Very early each morning, the camp took delivery of a vanload of fresh vegetables. On the day they struck, the cell's four men and two women put on naval uniform, hijacked the van, drove it down a side-street, emptied half of the contents and concealed themselves in the remainder, one constantly keeping a gun trained on the driver's head.

Successfully through the gates, they drove towards the kitchens, then turned away to the guardhouse where Cyril was being kept. Because the terrorists were in uniform, none of the detail set to guard Cyril suspected anything until they produced guns and grenades. By then it was too late; the custodians of the most dangerous pig in the world had their hands in the air and were being gagged and herded into an empty cell.

Cyril's cell was opened, the van was backed up to the guardhouse entrance. They chivvied Cyril into the back of the van and ordered the terrified driver to leave by the normal route at normal speed.

They took the van to a suburban garage, bound and gagged the driver and transferred to another van. Now they took the road for Marseilles, where a fast motorboat was waiting to take Cyril to a mountain hide-out in Corsica.

The circumstantial evidence is that the guardhouse had been watched all along; although the military could have just creamed Cyril and the greenshirts there and then, they needed to convince the public that Cyril's death hadn't simply been a quiet assassination. They let the vegetable van get away, and in moments, unmarked cars were tailing it. Now it was just a matter of getting enough firepower into position. Fifty commandos and 200 policemen had been sitting around waiting for this for weeks.

The terrorists ran into the roadblock just outside the seaside resort of La Ciotat. Not just uniformed flics, but also really big men with really short hair and really black body-armour.

As the van slowed, the terrorists probably saw the flashing lights of other police cars coming up behind them, of armoured cars pitching into position in the fields to either side of them. The men and women in the van at that moment must have known that even if they surrendered, they would not necessarily be permitted to live. They stopped the van and decided to take some of the enemy with them.

As soon as all the cars in front of them had passed through the roadblock, the shooting started. The terrorists and Cyril spilled out of the back door and took cover among the cars still lined up behind them. The innocent cowered in their vehicles, covered their children with their bodies, screamed, or tried to crawl to safety.

Rocket-propelled grenades hit the van from either side. It destructed in a ball of red and white flames. Cabbage-leaves were still falling to the ground a minute later.

Again, I know this not because I was there, but because cameras were.

Among the vehicles behind the van was a local TV crew on their way to La Ciotat to do a boring story about a yachting regatta. While you or I would be cowering and snivelling and praying, TV camera

operators see stuff like this as a career opportunity. This crazy woman gets out of the car and scurries over to where two of the terrorists are crouching, along with Cyril. She reaches them in time to see one of them plug a magazine into Cyril's neck, pull back the cocking-lever, pat him on the head and say something about going out and getting some of the bastards.

Cyril has no such intention. Cyril has been programmed to fight crime, defend the weak, do the right thing (etc., etc.).

Whether he realizes he's in mortal danger, or whether he thinks it's all play-acting is a moot point. But he now turns his nose on the terrorists beside him, and shoots both stone dead with two short bursts.

He then scampers off around the car, with the camerawoman in pursuit, to where two other terrorists are shooting at the police. These, also, he wastes.

Further along, he ignores one who is already wounded in the neck, but shoots the other.

The shooting stops as the police realize that nobody is firing back at them.

Now he emerges from cover, something the camerawoman is unprepared to do.

"Ne tirez pas! Les terroristes sont morts! J'ai tué les tous! Je vous ai aidé messieurs! Ne tirez pas!" he yells quite clearly in cockney-accented French. "Cyril saves the day again! Oinkiee oinkiee!" he adds in English.

Talk about ingratitude! Up to now Cyril has been described by some as an artificial intelligence, but artificial stupidity would be nearer the mark.

As he walks out into the open, a storm of gunfire opens up, twice as intense as previously.

The Cyberpig I designed had half his hide covered in bulletproof armour. When they built this Cyril, they took the design literally. I suppose they thought it might be neat to shoot real bullets at him at Mondo Future and have him delight audiences by emerging unscathed. The side that Cyril is presenting to the police is one of shiny aluminium, but beneath that there's enough Kevlar and ceramic plate to absorb anything at that range except a high-velocity rifle bullet.

About a dozen shells thud uselessly into him before he gets the message and runs for cover again. Cyril, programmed to believe that policemen are his friends, is perplexed.

"Blimey!" the camera records him saying to himself. "He was trying to kill me!"

The shooting stops. Drivers who have been stuck in the crossfire slam their cars into reverse to get out of this mess. Cyril is left standing in the middle of the road with the camerawoman.

Score: five dead terrorists to Cyril, one wounded one to the police, who have also scored three innocent bystanders dead and five injured.

Cyril was prime-time news across the world once more. He had eliminated five murderous terrorists, and yet the ungrateful French police tried to kill this hero on the spot.

Invited to a dinner party in one of the more boho parts of Bristol that night, I cried off, feigning illness. I knew damn well that the same people who wanted me to try and save Cyril a few weeks before would

now be lecturing me on how he was a proto-fascist vigilante who, by killing the terrorists in cold blood, had no respect for human rights.

I spent an hour driving around, looking for somewhere I could get some old-fashioned pork sausages for my dinner, just to prove my lack of respect for pigs' rights. Oh, and some black pudding for breakfast, please.

While the lawyers delightedly added this new factor into the debate over what to do with Cyril, Sous-telle said it changed nothing. It was further proof of Cyril's instability.

But Cyril, now in a police cell in Marseilles, was making plans of his own.

He bust out – literally. On the 14th July, during a noisy Bastille Day parade while his captors were drunk, he used his armoured bulk to smash through the walls of his cell and ran off into the night.

People said this was just another plot to quietly dispose of him, but, as the weeks passed and nothing more was heard of him, he was forgotten. It was later announced that Mondo Future had made a huge loss that year and might well close.

I was sitting down to dinner at my place one Friday evening in August, looking forward to a quiet (well, lonely) weekend when the doorbell rang. Cursing, I got up and opened it. There stood a short, muscular, middle-aged man in working clothes.

"Meester Davees?" he asked. His expression was fierce. He looked like one of those farmers who would dump trailer-loads of Golden Delicious apples in the streets of Paris in protest at something the EC had or hadn't done.

"Yes," I said cautiously.

"I 'ave somezheenk belonging to you," he said, his mouth cracking into a combination of pained grimace and malicious grin.

Beyond him, there was a Peugeot van parked in the street. "My cheeldren wanted to keep 'eem, but I detest 'eem. 'Ee is ruining my farm. 'Ee wanted to meet you. So I 'ave, 'ow do you say, smuggled 'eem over here through the Manche Tunnel."

This only six months since the European Commission had finally forced Britain to do away with formal border controls. The bastards!

I may have literally got down on my knees; I certainly babbled in English and GCSE French about this being nothing to do with me and he should take the bloody pig to the authorities.

He ignored me, turned and whistled. A boy of about ten climbed from the cab, walked around and opened the back doors. In the dusk, I saw the spark of a tear reflecting the street-lamp on the kid's face.

"Thomas! Vite! Il faut partir tout de suite!"

Cyril the Cyberpig clattered out of the van and onto the road. The kid bent and kissed him on the head. Cyril muttered something in French about his little friend and started trotting up my garden path.

Ain't life awful? Cyril arrives at the house of someone who hates him, and walks out of the life of a kid who loves him.

I was yelling at the miserable frog-eating peasant, offering him money – anything, dammit – but he was already pulling away.

"Are you gonna invite me in then, or what?" said

Cyril, looking up at me. "I'm a fugitive from injustice. I'd feel happier indoors." In person, he reminded me a lot of Bob Hoskins in *The Long Good Friday*.

"Um, yes," I said politely, like he was some annoying relative I didn't want to offend.

In the living room, the first thing his senses picked up on was my dinner, plus side-salad on the table.

"Luvverly! Nosh!" said Cyril. "I haven't eaten for ages." With that, he put his forelegs onto the table and tipped it towards him. The food came sliding to the floor, he stuck his snout in and ate.

I picked up the telephone. When a dangerous killer that the French police will want to extradite comes into your house and starts eating your dinner off the carpet, you dial 999, don't you?

An operator answered the call, asking which service I wanted.

Then the line went dead. Cyril was standing beside me, retracting the scissors in his leg. The telephone cord dangled uselessly at my feet.

He belched. "Luvverly grub," he said, "what's for pizzas? You got any pizzas? I could go a couple of pizzas."

"What did you do that for?" I asked.

"I'm a fugitive from injustice," said Cyril. "I'll take anyone in a fair scrap, but everyone's against me. We only call the police in when we clear my name."

"We?" I said, horrified.

"Yeah," he said, "you an' me. You're my creator. You are responsible for me. I've travelled across France to get to you. You're the only one who can help me."

"What the hell," I shouted, "makes you think I can help you?"

His front shoulders arched in a porcine shrug. "I don't know. You're the creator. I hoped you could tell me."

Then he pissed on the carpet.

I went into the kitchen and came back with my biggest, sharpest Sabatier. "Out! Out! Out!" I screamed, waving the knife in front of his little piggy eyes. "I am not your fucking creator! I created a cartoon. You were created by a bunch of faceless biotechs in Switzerland. You are nothing, I say nothing, to do with me!"

"I don't understand," said Cyril. "I don't know what I've done wrong. I don't remember very much. All I know is that the police tried to kill me when I was helping them. I remember walking across France, at night, to avoid being spotted. I remember hiding in a barn where Thomas found me and said he'd help me and take me to you..."

While all this may sound sorry and pathetic, he still spoke in that irritatingly jolly cartoon voice.

"You killed people, Cyril. You shot some spectators at Mondo Future. Do you remember that?"

"Yes. No. I dunno. I remember something hit my nose and hurt it. I was narked."

"Did you know that there was live ammunition in your gun?"

"Dunno."

"And what about the terrorists you killed?"

"Who? I don't remember. It's not my job to kill. I'm not supposed to hurt anyone. It's my job to entertain people by helping the police and protecting the weak... You sure you haven't got any pizzas?"

No matter how mad I was, I didn't have the guts to kill him.

I had a few Lean Cuisines in the freezer, which I microwaved and gave to my voracious guest. ("Naaah! S'Allright, slop it all into a pile on the floor, mate").

I thought about climbing out of a back window and running for help. But I could just see myself showing up at the local nick and trying to explain to the desk sergeant that Cyril the Cyberpig was in my living-room. Even if they believed me, even if I wasn't packed off to the nuthouse, they wouldn't want to know. Forgetting Cyril was favourite by everyone, apart from young Thomas.

**S**o Cyril stayed at my place. That night, I tried to explain to him what had happened, but it was impossible. Neither his pig's brain nor the computer could comprehend what he had done wrong. He had little subjective memory; aside from his programming, he could only communicate his basic urges (feeding and scratching). He could tell you about all his adventures in cartoons, at Mondo Future and on the cinema screen. He had, in his memory, saved the world from the evil Dr Obnoxor and other criminals, hundreds of times. He was a hero, loved by all, a fearless crusader against crime. He remembered the police shooting at him all right – it had so traumatized him that he got it into his head that his creator was the one who could help him. He called himself a victim of injustice – which he was – but he was parroting a line from one of his scripts without really understanding it. And he kept forgetting my requests that he not piss and defecate on the carpet. I'm untidy at the best of times, people say my place looks like a pigsty, but this was ridiculous.

Cyril had a powerful need to understand, to know where he slotted into the Great Jigsaw of Being, but he didn't have the brains to take it all in, no matter how simple I tried to make it.

He had a hell of an appetite, so I had to go shopping next morning. My mind was still working overtime, trying to figure out what to do with Cyril. I thought of finding a phone booth and calling James and Maria, but I decided it wouldn't be fair. After years of trying, they'd just had their first baby, and it didn't seem fair to spoil their happiness with my problems just yet.

When I got home, the pig was up against the desk in the corner of the living room, with a jack extended from his cybernetic front leg into my PC.

"I'm going to have to report you for this, you know."

"What!?"

"I was looking at your tax-returns and your accounts. You've broken the law. You've been running up your expense figures. You owe the Revenue an extra £3.17."

"Cyril! Shut up! I am your creator! I am God, I can do anything I damn well please, and I'll thank you not to go prying into my personal affairs."

He noticed the shopping bags. "Great!" he said. "Nosh! I'm famished!"

While he grunted and snorted his way through the groceries, planning his menus for the weekend, a little lightbulb came on over my head. If I couldn't tell Cyril the meaning of his life through his ears, I might make it via his computer.

"Cyril," I said, "if I explain everything to you, will



you promise to go away and leave me alone for ever?"

"Dunno," said Cyril, preoccupied with the food.

"Are you gonna get cooking, or what?"

"No," I said, "it'll have to wait a while." I was opening drawers, looking through all my bits and pieces, and making a mental shopping-list. Then I went out, got into the car and headed for the nearest electronic suppliers', where I bought a load of memory, a paper-scanner/encoder, some interfaces, fast assembler software and various other bits of wire.

It cost a lot, but I figured it would be worth it. I might even be able to claim it against tax.

When I got back, he was watching TV. A farming programme on the Business Channel about pig-breeding.

"Worrrrr!" he said, not bothering to look my way. "Look at the dangly, wobbly things on that one! I'd like to climb on the back of that and, then, then..."

"And then what, Cyril?"

"I dunno. Something."

"I think the expression you're looking for is 'pork her'."

The Mondo Future bosses hadn't wanted a tourist attraction prone to unpredictable urges. The castration had probably been the first operation on the list.

After Cyril's lunch – five pizzas, three veggieburgers, a pineapple and two litres of supermarket cola, I set to work. I now knew how to dispose of him. Some friends, she a novelist, he a poet, had bought a smallholding in a remote part of Scotland to grow beans and pursue their muses in tranquility. They had no money; I had. I would give Cyril the gift of understanding (I hoped), then drive him up there and pay them whatever they asked to look after him and keep quiet about it until the bastard died of rust or old age. He might even be useful about the farm. He'd certainly scare the bejeezus out of burglars.

I jacked into his brain, a micro to kill for, a custom-built box packed with optically-networked artificial neurons, a no-frills version of the old Real World Computer prototype.

There was plenty of spare capacity, but I needed even more. Leaving the motor and sensory systems in place, I first wiped his ability to speak French, German and Japanese. Then I knocked out all the Mondo Future bullshit, the storylines of most of his previous adventures and sundry other rubbish. It would, of course, have been a sight easier if I could have just wiped everything in there and let him revert to being a regular pig. But he had once been a valuable piece of property and there was no overriding the core and anthropomorphic behaviour systems short of cutting him open and pulling them out.

Then, I got out my SPAM files. SPAM, or Serial Personality Action Memory is a little media trick used for storing fictional characters. We use low-grade versions at the firm, but they're more generally employed by soap-opera scriptwriters. With SPAM you can ask what a certain character would do in a certain situation, what s/he would say, and what vocabulary (slang, regional expressions, etc.) they'd use to say it. SPAM also avoids continuity errors; if someone says she loves strawberry ice-cream, she doesn't say she's always hated the stuff in an episode five years later. Soap addicts notice little mistakes like that and, say its fans, SPAM gives your characters more depth and



credibility. I once held a half-hour conversation with a SPAM; aside from its grinding banality and the fact that it was done via a VDU, you'd swear you were passing the time of day with some daft old codger on a bus. We're not far off the times when soaps will be written entirely by machines.

A TV producer friend, looking for a successful young businessman with a creative edge for a soap he was planning, made a SPAM of me a year ago on the understanding that I would remain anonymous. I agreed to do it for a laugh, because I thought it might be an interesting memento for my grandchildren (if I ever had any), but mainly because I owed him a huge favour after borrowing his mixing-desk for a series of ads that needed some highly specialized sound effects. On and off, he spent six months quizzing me about everything from my political attitudes through to the history of my love-life. I would never have got involved if I'd known it would take so long. In the event, the soap never got made, and he gave me the discs, promising he'd wiped any copies.

These I now took and updated. After that it became rather like one of those stews you make when you're a student. I threw in everything; press reports on me and on Cyril, my own fitfully-written diary since I was 12, the contents of my personal organizers, both paper and electronic. I even thought of going and getting my favourite love-letters from the attic and putting them through the scanner, but then I figured that if it went wrong and Cyril was to go around parroting the juicy bits, it might all prove rather embarrassing. I mean, your adolescent diaries are embarrassing enough.

Many, many hours later, I downloaded the lot into Cyril and went to bed, letting him chew it all over, assemble meaning from the written stuff, file it all in the right place and try and figure it out.

He was still humming away, putting every little scrap into its proper place when I drove off to work on Monday morning.

I came home early from work that evening, having still spared James and Maria my news. As I opened the door, I didn't know what to expect. Cyril might have gone apeshit and trashed my house, or he might have just walked off into the sunset.

The living-room had been sort of tidied, and Cyril was lying on the floor with a book on art history in front of him, opened at one of my favourite paintings. He was also jacked into my PC. He had gone into files I had made down the years for what I call my Masterpiece Project, the great work of animator's art I'm going to do one day because it's important and not because I want the money.

It's to be a feature-length animation, an ancient Roman/Greek fantasy with artwork based on paintings by Millais, Burne-Jones, Alma-Tadema, Rossetti and Holman Hunt. It would be filled with grand spectacle, subtle detail and ravishing colours. I was going to bring the Pre-Raphaelites to life!

I first had the idea years ago when I fell in love with H-H's *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*. It had been inspired by a Keats poem, and depicts a woman nuzzling up to a flowerpot in which she's hidden the severed head of her lover who's been killed by her brothers and which is now fertilizing the herbs very

nicely. The model was Hunt's beautiful young wife Fanny; they'd been married a few months and had moved to Florence. He was absolutely besotted with her, and so eager to paint her that he made her pose for hours in fierce heat, even though she was pregnant. The tragedy in the painting was to be matched in real life, as Fanny died six weeks after the birth of the child, a boy.

(They called the child Cyril, by the way, an ominous coincidence whose meaning I still haven't figured out.) "She is adorable, ain't she?" said Cyril, pointing his nose to the picture.

"I thought you only fancied pigs with dangly, wobbly bits, Cyril," I said, not entirely sure what was going through his mind.

"Not any more. And that Jane Morris, the woman Rossetti used for *Proserpine*, she was a bit of all right, wasn't she? I don't think much to the Alma-Tadema women, mind. Right old dogs if you ask me..."

"Cyril! Don't be sexist! You're no Adonis yourself!" "You fucking hypocrite!" he said. "I'm only repeating your opinion."

"That's as may be. We like Alma-Tad for his exquisite colours."

"Yeah. An' we like the way he does the marble. Paints a luvverly bit of marble, does Alma-Tad... I can't wait to get started. I want to make Jane Morris and Fanny Hunt move. I want them to live again."

"That's my line, Cyril."

"I know. You programmed it in, remember? Y' stupid bastard!"

I was one up on Holman-Hunt. He had only reproduced his wife in oils. I had reproduced myself in pork. Cyril was no longer a chirpy cartoon pig, but a driven, intolerant, egotistical, obstinate, foul-mouthed know-it-all. I was getting to like him more already.

The second night, I brought back all the kit that he'd need to start work on the animation. He scanned in *Isabella* and the *Pot of Basil* and began encoding it.

The third night, when I got home, he showed me what he'd done on the TV screen. Six whole seconds of Fanny Hunt, her head resting on the pot, her chest rising and falling slightly. She sighs. A faint breeze ripples her hair and swings the lamp that hangs close by.

It was a bit naff, but we were on our way. All I needed now was a script. Cyril and I could knock up the storyboards together and he could do all the grafting. We might finish it inside three years.

Then the doorbell rang.

It was Carol, my own great love who had walked out on me months ago. "I got your message," she said.

"My message?"

"The computer mailbox at work..."

"Oh..." I said, "right. Yes. Um, hold on a minute."

I left her standing at the door and dashed back to the living-room. I noticed that my PC had been plugged into the modem. Cyril winked and sauntered off to the kitchen. I went back and ushered Carol in, tidying the plates and takeaway wrappers and newspapers and other rubbish off the sofa. She looked around the room. "It smells horrible in here," she said.

"Yes. I think a cat must have got in an open window and sprayed the place," I improvised.

We sat. "So," I said, "how are you getting on?"

"Look, I..." we both said at once, then laughed nervously.

"I didn't know you wrote poetry," she said.

No, nor did I, unless... Oh my God! The adolescent diaries!

"I came really to find out why you did it. It wasn't all that good. It's not some kind of wind-up, is it?"

"Carol," I said, trying to look her in the eye, "I'm really glad you came, but it wasn't me who sent the message, well, it was, but only sort of, um... Oh hell!" There was nothing for it. I went over to the door, opened it, and in walked Cyril.

"This must be Carol," said Cyril. "I'm really pleased ter meetcha. Sorry about the awful poem, but it was the best he could do. Gawd! Has anyone ever told you you look just like that Lizzie Siddal in Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix*?"

It was only then that Carol screamed.

**C**yril, programmed with most of my personality, could not really be described as "cute," or even "interesting." He's actually slightly worse than me (I hope), a consequence of my having fed my diaries in. The diaries have always tended to catharsis, so they're full of moaning and bitching.

You could say that all I've got is a souped-up computer with an attitude problem that accounts for three quarters of our weekly grocery bill, but I'm sort of attached to him. So is Carol. She likes to think she

can complain about me by telling him off. She never picks on him unless I'm in the room.

He couldn't be at the wedding, but it felt like he, and not James, should have been my best man. I sold my share of the company to James and Maria and have set up my own little firm, not because I wanted to break away from them, but because Carol and I bought the middle-class dream and now have a 17th-century farmhouse in the Cotswolds that we can't really afford. Carol is working on a book and Cyril, his whereabouts still a mystery to the rest of humanity, works with me on the as-yet untitled masterpiece. When the time is right, the world will hear of Cyril the Cyberpig again.

Assuming I don't kill him first.

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**Eugene Byrne** is known to *Interzone* readers as collaborator with his old school chum Kim Newman on the "USSA" stories (the third of which, "Tom Joad," appeared in our last issue). The above tale is his first solo effort for us, although a few have appeared elsewhere under a pseudonym. He has also written a considerable amount of journalism, and works as deputy editor of a local magazine in Bristol.

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# Thin Ice, Sun Burns

## John Clute

Damon Knight is thin ice. He is as smooth as ice, and it looks like you can see right through him, and maybe you'll manage to skid dry-shod all the way across the bridge of words to the other side. But then again, you may not. Or—as in the case of *Why Do Birds* (Tor Books, \$17.95)—you may never know whether or not you made it: made the reading, made terminus unscathed, earned your aesthetic keep. It is rather like reading the most elusive of all younger genre writers, George Alec Effinger, whose books are also shaped like traps and smile like traps and butter wouldn't melt in his mouth and you never know for sure if you still have your pants. A novel by Damon Knight (or at any rate one of the late novels, the ones he's published since the mid 1980s) dares you to read it, on past the warning sign, the sheepish skull. It is the dare of thin ice: that there may be nothing to fear, no moving water at the heart. A novel by Damon Knight takes the shape of a trap that may not close.

*Why Do Birds*, for instance, seems to be a simple cautionary tale about the end of the world, with a few recursive tidbits tossed into the mix to maintain in genre readers a sense of comforting *déjà vu*, and all told in a tone of glassy serenity that slides you in and downwards with a sheepish grin. It is 2002. Ed Stone is being interviewed by a prison psychiatrist after his arrest. His problem, he tells the psychiatrist, lies in his belief that aliens kidnapped him in 1931, when he was 30, and after testing him have whisked him up to 2002 and deposited him back on Earth so that he can persuade the authorities to build a huge box big enough to house the human race, and to put every single person inside that box in a state of cryogenic slumber, and the aliens will then return and take the box with them to another planet because this one is doomed. This sure sounds crazy, Ed Stone says, and 2002 sure seems pretty weird. Judas Priest, he adds. (It is a 1931 euphemism for Jesus Christ.) The only thing I have on my side, he says, is the ring the aliens gave me. If I shake hands with anyone, and touch them with my ring, they'll do anything in the world for me.

And so it is. Ed Stone shakes hands a few times, walks out of prison, gathers a retinue around him (it has some resemblance to the cadre which surrounds the oddly similar and

serene superchild protagonist of *The Man in the Tree* [1984]), engages in some interesting discussions about the logistics of building a box enormous enough to hold the race in, gets the box built and the corpse accessions process properly underway, and the plot thickens. Evidence begins to mount that Ed Stone is in fact a charlatan and has based much of his description of the aliens on "Dark Moon," a novella by Charles W. Diffin published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in May 1931 (a true ascription, by the way: Diffin existed, and so did "Dark Moon," and so did the Wesso cover). But nobody has any explanation for the magic ring, though "three A-team whores" (ie ace expert witnesses hired to defend Stone against accusations that he's a fraud), think the ring may contain one of the "naturally occurring neurochemicals in human beings" that pass down from parent to child and account for the stability of prejudices and for the low apostasy rate among Mormons, whose children tend to remain secluded in family bondage until early adulthood, hence avoiding exposure to other ideas "and other neurochemicals" until it's far too late: they're stone bonded Mormons: fixed for good. But this does not explain why Ed Stone would wish to persuade the human race to get into a box.

The only reason for his doing so, of course, is that the world is indeed going to end, and does. And the book shrugs to an elegiac halt, and the curtain falls. The smile of the telling has never faltered, the calm off-the-cuff unfolding of the slow and strangely undramatic tale, as though it were an anecdote, a gossip, a crackerbarrel Chorus at Thebes. "And then I noticed he'd done something to his eyes, clawed them out I reckon. Judas Priest." And you discover, at the end, that the secret of thin ice in 1992 is that no trap is necessary. Everything I have told you, says the book, everything you ever feared to dream, is true. Under the sheepish serenity of its surface, *Why Do Birds* conveys a most extraordinary charge of melancholy. In the valley of the shadow of death (it seems to say) there is no need to waste time with sharpened spikes. It is enough for a reader to enter the book (to be alive in this year), to read the book through (to stay alive long enough in this world to see the course of things), and to shut the page down (and to shut the page down).

Sean McMullen, an Australian (b. 1948) who makes his living as a computer systems analyst, has been publishing short stories since 1986, and in *Call to the Edge* (Aphelion Publications, \$12.95) presents a gathering of his work. The effect is very peculiar. It is possible to notice—it is in fact impossible not to notice—that McMullen is something of a crank hand when it comes to plotting and to characterization. Several of the stories—"The Eyes of the Green Lancer," "The Deciad" and "While the Gate is Open" in particular—accumulate such a supercharge of imperfectly clear exposition that by their jumbled conclusions it is very nearly impossible to follow the instructions of the text, and understand anything at all. But at the same time "The Eyes of the Green Lancer," for most of its length, is deeply enthralling, because McMullen, unlike most writers in 1992, is desperately interested in devices: wind-sail trains; computers iconographically similar to but of an eccentricity far more intriguing than the Difference Engine embedded into the Gibson/Sterling novel of that name; intricacies of contrivance described with a hobbyist's zeal (but in the case of this story without any of obliviousness of the hobbyist to the folk who have to listen). So he is something of an ancient mariner as he stoppeth. He can be, on occasion, something of a bore. But when he gets his teeth into Device, and manages to have a story which embodies Device without interminable couillises of explanation, then he can sound like Keith Roberts with a world to make.

With a condign humbleness of mien, Ian McDonald entitles his second story collection *Speaking in Tongues* (Bantam, \$4.99, Gollancz, £14.99), and provides exactly what the reader might expect from an announcement of this candour. *Speaking in Tongues* is a series of exercises—none more cunning and engaging than the title story, whose riff of Gene Wolfe is hilarious—in doing the police in different voices. It is an assemblage of essays in style, tone of voice. The subject matters are of less interest (indeed there is hardly an unfamiliar theme or trope in any of the 11 tales included). What counts is the profusion of registers. "Rainmaker Cometh" does a heat-lightning jangle of Bradbury/Sturgeon/



Lafferty to a nicety, though the death of one of the protagonists at story's end seems utterly gratuitous; "Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" much improves on the flytrap paralysis of D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*; "Approaching Perpendicular," though its representation of the Artist is singularly naff, neatly juices up M. John Harrison with a Robert Silverberg transcendental slingshot epiphany pompadour prong you're flying!

A couple of stories say themselves as well as the exercise, too: "Toward Kilimanjaro" may polish itself a bit on J.G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* (1966), and explicitly quotes Conrad on Darkness, Heart of; but the tale itself is remarkably well characterized, Kenya is neatly anatomized, and the alien transformation of Kilimanjaro itself into a new post-carbon domain is neatly conceived. And "Floating Dogs," though not unpredictable, carries through. And "Fronds," set on a colony planet visited by a Japanese plenipotentiary while imported dolphins attempt to justify their own immoral behaviour in an absolutely inspired re-creation of bardic narrative verse, is simply superb.

McDonald (this reviewer expressed feelings of aroused ambivalence about the denuding violence of *Hearts, Hands and Voices in Interzone 59*) is a strange case, a singularly accomplished maker (and pusher) of material. He is a monster, perhaps, a tropical feeder on the compost of century-end; and someday he is going to have to stop repeating words ("pecking, pecking birds" appear twice in different tales); but there is something going on. You begin to sense he may be turning toward the sun.

(John Clute)

## A Fantasy Lampoon

### Chris Gilmore

Take one part David Gemmell, one part Tolkien, one part prime appeasement; stir but leave lumpy. The result might well turn out to be *Grunts* by Mary Gentle (Bantam, £14.99).

The idea is simple but original: a horde of wild orcs, helped by a pair of renegade halflings, gains control of a dragon's treasure, in which (for reasons only disclosed in the last chapter) much of the evil of the 20th century is accumulated — chewing gum, cowboy boots, but principally a great variety of military hardware and the U.S. Marines' Training Manual. Recognizing a good thing, they combine the weaponry, discipline and esprit de corps with their pre-existing traditions

of extortion, rape, murder and cannibalism in the standard fantasy context of magical warfare between Light and Darkness.

Not a bad joke, but thin to spread over 400 pages. The Harvard Lampoon did something similar in *Bored of the Rings*, re-telling Tolkien's story in a context of extreme moral and physical squalor; Mary Gentle's technique is similar, but she fleshes out her tale with a professional's armoury of well-tried literary effects. The idea is not so much developed as inflated, to take in electioneering (corrupt), evangelism (bogus) and BEMs from Outer Space (Ziff-Davis traditional). Mary Gentle splatters these easy targets, and it's fun the first time; there's a roaring tavern scene reminiscent of *Mindswap*, a courtroom scene reminiscent of "The Trial of Hissing Sid," a running joke about the orcs sustaining innumerable casualties without ever becoming less numerous (familiar from *Typewriter in the Sky*) and plenty of traditional jokes about sexual tastes, bodily functions etc. The old jokes are best, and Mary Gentle tells them well (a newer one, about mixing the past and historic present tenses, doesn't work); but the book's lack of purpose becomes ever more apparent as the characters lay, flay and betray each other from choice, habit or nervous tic.

Mary Gentle's writing, according to the man from *The Times*, is "as intricate as filigree but as tough as wrought-iron." I note the misused hyphen, and wonder what else the wretched hack had been sent. Prolonged exposure to what passes for literary fiction these days does nothing for the palate. In fact, and in keeping with the subject matter, she writes with more vigour than grace, though there's an occasional gem:

The nameless necromancer freed one patchwork-gloved hand from the reins to point wildly down at Ferenzia and the plain.

"We've been overrun! We're going to die!"

Ashnak's upper lip pulled back from his tusks in a snarl. "You're a necromancer, dammit. It isn't death — it's a learning experience."

But her range is limited. At one point the halfling brothers murder a sleeping family in cold blood for a fairly modest sum. In other hands this could have been a sudden and shocking window from fantasy into reality — as if a Tom & Jerry cartoon were intercut with a documentary about vivisection of cats. Gentle ignores the opportunity; the death of the family has the same cartoon quality as when an undead orc sews a severed toe back on.

Altogether, this is not a book for adults, but I suppose there's too much smut and mayhem for Bantam to offer it as a juvenile. Undeterred, I'll be

offering it to a juvenile; take note, those readers who also have nephews or nieces aged 11 to 14.

(Chris Gilmore)

## History Lesson

### Neil Jones

History flows one way and so writers of historical fiction, in one sense at least, have it easy: the events they write of are already fixed. *Sf* writers, by contrast, have to invent a whole future and then convince us of its credibility. Usually they do that in a single work, but a few have taken on the great *sf* challenge and constructed a full-scale future history. Heinlein's is perhaps the most famous to aficionados of this particular sub-genre, along with Asimov's Foundation series, but people like Larry Niven and Poul Anderson have made it a major part of their careers.

C.J. Cherryh joined the future historian's ranks many books ago and her *Alliance/Union* series has taken on an impressive depth and intricacy. Now with *Hellburner* (New English Library, £14.99) and its immediate predecessor, *Heavy Time*, Cherryh has gone back — both in space and in time — to Sol system and the earliest point in her history so far, to shed more light on the emergence of her two human galactic superstates.

Future historical info-dump: the merchanter Alliance is yet to be born but Union is already in existence, out at the far end of human-explored space, and rebelling — with scary success — against the Earth Company and its military arm, the Fleet (see *Cyteen* for Union's point of view). An increasingly desperate Earth is working on a fighter ship — the hellburner of the title — that it hopes will give it the edge. But things are not going at all well on the project...

*Hellburner* opens with Ben Pollard, ex-Belter, about to clinch a very comfy billet on Earth itself. Or so he thinks. Decker, chief test-pilot on the hellburner project and a man who Pollard doesn't much like, is in a critical condition and asking for him. (See *Heavy Time* for more on their relationship, although the two books can stand alone). Bad news for Pollard, as he finds himself, powerless, right at the centre of some serious infighting between various factions of the Fleet and Earth Company. And, this being a Cherryh book, nobody is going to give him (let alone us) much idea of what's going on until near the end.

To an extent, that's a problem with the book. Keeping the reader in the dark can be a good device for building up tension (just as the soporific effects

of a generously weighted info-dump can come in handy against insomnia) but a little judicious revelation sprinkled through the story would have been welcome, particularly in those early stages where the tension Pollard feels seems out of proportion to what we know – or rather suspect – may be going on. Still this is a characteristic we've come to expect from Cherryh books, information sieved out to both protagonists and readers through a mesh so fine that the characters have only intuition – and suspicion – to base their decisions on.

But there is another problem: Pollard, our first viewpoint character, whose dilemma opens the book, is gradually shunted onto the sidelines and although we get other viewpoints, principally the gradually recovering Decker and the Fleet representative, Lieutenant Graf (who is almost as much in the dark as everybody else), neither of them is really brought centre-stage to replace Pollard as the story's focus. And as for those problems and fears that loomed so large for Pollard at the beginning of the book, they blur as it goes on and finally get tidied away rather unconvincingly at the end in a wave of comradeship.

**T**hat aside, the novel also has, as you'd expect from Cherryh, a lot going for it. Despite the sidelining of Pollard, from about halfway through, when the Fleet shows its hand, the book really begins to grip, perhaps because it's possible to start formulating guesses as to what's actually going on – and how things might turn out. Also, it's very strong on the wrap-around detail of a hi-tech spacer life and the characters inhabit their world as naturally and fully as in any first-rate historical novel. The difference, of course, is that everything has to come from Cherryh's imagination.

It also scores on the future-historical front, too. Now this is tricky stuff. The book has to work for readers who have never read any of her Alliance/Union series before – something that's difficult for me to judge but I'd say it probably does. It also has to satisfy readers who know, future-historically speaking, what is going to happen a century or two down the line: (info-dump alert) the Fleet gets its fighter, continues the struggle against Union before eventually losing and, simultaneously, giving rise to the Alliance in the process (see *Downbelow Station*). And it does.

Also, with what's going on in the world right now, Cherryh's depiction of humanity's seemingly innate factionalism should strike uncomfortably close to home. As she says in her introduction, "Humans have throughout history been fractious and argumentative creatures to govern." But it's not just Union versus Earth, it's Fleet versus Earth Company versus Earth

government, plus further opposing groups within each of them, down – ultimately – to the individuals themselves. In a Cherryh book, nobody confides much in anybody else because, most of the time, they aren't trust anybody else – which, of course, puts her characters under titanic stress right from the first page up until story's end (and often even beyond). Suspicion is a basic survival trait. But of course, in the final analysis, this is just one more escapist science-fiction book. After all, things just don't work like that in real life, now do they?

(Neil Jones)

## The Lure of the Past Philip Kelsey

**I**f, when you open *Nightshade* by Mark Gatiss (Virgin, £3.99; *The New Doctor Who Adventures* # 8) you are expecting one of those miserable TV novelizations, unreadable by anyone who isn't either under the age of nine or a heavily committed fan, you will be pleasantly surprised. One thing the *New Adventures* have plenty of is ambition. Peter Darvill-Evans, in his preface to *Timewyrm: Genesis* (the first *New Adventure*), said the series would feature "complex, challenging plots with serious themes." Can he be serious? This is Doctor Who he's talking about, after all.

Well, a glance at *Nightshade* shows something is afoot. The epigraph is from Proust, and the first few characters in the book seem to be more late-period Kingsley Amis than the kind of cannon fodder that normally knocks around bashing Daleks. The *Nightshade* concept itself gives rise to a number of meta-textual gags, being a clever-clever reference to the real world's perception of Doctor Who, and I even found myself worried in case people got killed. The baddy of the piece is the Sentience, which has a rather unusual *modus operandi*. To attract a victim it presents them with an emotionally charged character from their own past. Having drawn them off into a quiet corner in search of a long lost lover, wife, brother or baby, it "harvests" them, turning them into rotten meat in the process.

So far so good. Can Gatiss keep it up? Well, yes and no. The book is best with its main characters, who are memorable and complex. There are some good, accurate passages of description, and some particularly convincing evocations of the speech patterns of 1968 (as well as rather cruder attempts to evoke the politically energized spirit of the times).

On the other hand the book has its difficulties. It's too long; there are too many minor characters, and the plot isn't up to much, being a familiar "age-old menace aroused by the electrical emissions of the nearby Research Lab" sort of affair. There's much too-ing and fro-ing in a not especially satisfying way, and Gatiss's strategy of engaging the reader by revealing small tragedies (introduce a likeable character and kill them) becomes tiresome after a time. The logic of the Sentience's methods of murder eventually seems to run adrift, and I've met a lot of the plot devices before (the impassable ring around the village, the radio disturbance that wasn't coming from outer space after all but rather closer to home...)

The thing is, I don't really think Gatiss's heart is in the laser-pistol-and-starship side of it. The only character (a certain *Timelord* excepted) who manages to escape from a direct attack from the Sentience is Ace, who actively rejects her past. When we consider this in conjunction with the Proust epigraph ("...the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost"), and the character of Holly, who is unable to respond to life with full emotionality because of her longing for a dead boyfriend, we see that Gatiss has a subtext, and it is bellowing at us: "Nostalgia screws you up: heed not its insidious lure."

**Y**et if *Nightshade* is a Morality Tale who is it best aimed at? The readers? Oh, quite possibly. What's the biggest reason for people reading Doctor Who? Couldn't be nostalgia, could it? We all know that Doctor Who was best when we were seven, we all have our own particular terrified Saturday teatime memories... But let's have a quick run through the other books in the series and see if there isn't another group of people who could put this message to work for them.

When the *New Adventures* appeared Peter Darvill-Evans's claims seemed so much hype. The first couple of books in the *Timewyrm* series were pretty well the same old stuff. They were longer, they were more complicated, they were very competent, but the characters were still flat as could be and the handling of serious themes seemed to extend just as far as throwing in bits of sex and sadism.

By the time of *Revelation* (*Timewyrm* # 4), things were starting to move. The writing was altogether less disposable and there were a few moments of real drama between realistic characters. The second series (*Car's Cradle*) began with a jolt with *Time's Crucible* by Marc Platt. This proved once and for all that the people at Virgin weren't standing still, yet its impossibly convoluted plot pointed out the dangers of taking risks. War-

head by Andrew Cartmel came close to being a real adult thriller but didn't quite make it, again chiefly because of its plot, where, if you needed a bottle of milk, you would send an SAS cell to attack the dairy. Witch Mork by Andrew Hunt rounded off the Cat's Cradle story with an average, heard-it-before tale of an "alien" folk breaking through into our dimension.

Where does that leave us? Eight books, some much better than others, most of them still, I'm afraid, fairly predictable.

Look again at Cartmel's *Warhead*, the most striking of the lot. As a thriller it was average; strong components making only a weak total. Yet as an indicator of the life left in the Doctor Who concept it was a revelation. Cartmel has been accused by the fan magazine *DWB* of failing to understand Doctor Who, and it's true that his book stands apart from the rest of the series, although it's hard to put a finger on the difference. He has averagely drawn characters in a near-future world dominated by the fallout from greed, pollution and corporate corruption; many elements are familiar from *Blode Runner*, Stephen King, Frank Miller; the plot is wildly implausible – yet something happens. The *TARDIS* appears only as lights around corners and disembodied sounds, the Doctor keeps aloof from us all the way through – and then, somehow, the magic begins to flow, and the Doctor is reborn as a Hero.

However inadvertently, Mark Gatiss has diagnosed a problem with the whole *New Adventures* series. Fortunately Cartmel has the solution. The Doctor is Superman. He is Daddy, Biggles, someone to run to, someone who Knows What to Do, who can Sort it Out. But we need to believe the Danger before we can succumb to the myth of Power, and these days we need a modern telling of adult threats and more than a hint of darkness to make us scurry behind the sofa. Look at *Botman* before and after Frank Miller, or *Worlock* before and after Jim Starlin. The problem with the *New Adventures* is the same; despite the new energy, despite the sense that the writers actually care about the stuff they are writing, despite a commendable experimentation in tone and concept, the *New Adventures* are still using the threats and the storylines of an earlier period filtered through the writers' fond remembrance. As a result they are dilute, camp – even decadent.

Somewhere at the heart of the Doctor Who ethos there is a powerful and resonant cluster of ideas; the little man, the *TARDIS*, the umbrella – they need to be excavated and re-examined away from the clutter of 30 years' history. As the surviving characters in *Nightshade* show us, the writers should be forced to reject the lure of

the past. It may well have been very good then, even great then, but this is now.

(Philip Kelsey)

## High Ideals of Manhood

### Chris Gilmore

There's what you could call an archetypal Poul Anderson situation. Our hero is alone on the scene of a battle in which he has taken active part. Around him the heaped dead include enemies with whom he would far rather not have gone to war, for in happier times he had liked and respected them; also friends he knew and loved (and some of whom died by friendly fire which he himself had directed). Our hero broods on the bitter necessities of war, on the folly and corruption of politicians, bureaucrats and capitalists which give rise to it, and the unseemly hysteria of the civilian mob which feeds it. He thinks of his wife and children, hoping but not confident that the sacrifice of his generation will bring about a better life for the next.

If he is thinking these thoughts as his life ebbs away from a mortal wound, the rest of the story will be told in flashback; if not, he will resoulder his burden of command and return to the mayhem. Duty calls.

It is, of course, easy to sneer. Poul Anderson has been around for over 40 years, and writes to a consistently high standard. His worst books (*Shield*, *The Byworder*, *The High Crusade*) are nothing to be ashamed of, while his best (*Tau Zero*, *The Enemy Stars*, *Brainwove*, *The Merman's Children*, *World Without Stars*, *Let the Space-mon Beware*, *The Winter of the World*, *The Long Way Home* – make your own list) are among the jewels of the post-war period. His recent volume, *Conflict* (Severn House, £13.99), is a book of ten stories, running from 1956 to 1973, which could be subtitled "a Poul Anderson sampler," and if you don't know his work it's worth reading to see if you like it.

No fantasy is included, which is a pity as it has a serious if minor place in Anderson's oeuvre, but otherwise his characteristic strength lies in an insistent appeal to the moralist that lurks in the recesses of the loucheest soul. It's impossible to read him for long without a feeling that this self-conscious cultivation of valour and honour, this passionate desire to preserve, enrich and disseminate beauty, above all this stern devotion to duty, represent the highest ideal of manhood.

His principal weaknesses are many but minor. First and least important, a habit of incorporating in the dialogue ungainly data-dumps that could easily be accommodated in the narrative. Next, a tendency to admit an occasional thoughtless cliché. In one of these stories two officers go "on a drinking-bout which must by now have become a part of the local mythology." I don't believe it for a moment. To become part of the mythology you'd have to do something fairly horrible, and they aren't the type. Third, his politics; Anderson was a blue-green long before the term had been invented, and this stands up well, but he was also a Cold Warrior. Now that the Cold War is over, and his side won, the stories which combine cold-war thinking and Andersonian violet seem to belong to another and less convincing timestream. Curiously it's "Pugilist," the most recent story, which is the most dated in this respect.

Finally, his women. Anderson is a very masculine writer, with little interest in the range of female character. The men are thus limited to two types of relationship: they can be near-ideal husbands, torn from their families by the misfortunes of war, or they can be love 'em and leave 'em types for whom the pang of leaving always outweighs the pleasure of a transient embrace. In either case the women are strictly two-dimensional, and woe betide Anderson when he tries to make it otherwise. In *The Avotter* he made the tyro's blunder of falling in love with his heroine, most surprising in a man of his age and experience. In this book, "Time Lag" actually has a female protagonist; it's a slightly sentimental story, given life by Elva's role as someone's wife, mother, grandmother, etc. I cast no stone; Anderson is under no compulsion to pander to the feminists, but if his women had more individuality his writing would gain a dimension. So would his men.

Probably the best time to make Anderson's acquaintance is in adolescence. That was my good fortune, and I well remember the thrill of reading "Among Thieves" (1957) in a second-hand Astounding when it was two or three years old. On the other hand, I didn't encounter "Details" (1956) until I was well into my thirties (*Worlds of If* was nothing like so readily available in England). It has lasted pretty well too. So get this one for the 14-year-old, but read it yourself first. Why should the boys have all the fun?

(Chris Gilmore)

# British Magazine Reviews

John Duffield

**N**exus looks wonderful. Issue 2 is a professional-quality A4 glossy with full-colour cover and tip-top production standards. But note that it isn't your usual kind of f&sf zine. There's a high proportion of articles and reviews, and the stories refer to writing. Thus I suppose it's a magazine about fiction rather than a fiction magazine. No problem in itself, but the introspection produces some negative vibes. Consider "10 Things I've Learned About Writing" by Scott Edelman. This recounts then breaks writing rules such as "you must first create a sympathetic character," whilst telling of the father who microwaves the gerbil and then butchers his own son. There's more butchery in "The Future of Science Fiction" by Geoff Ryman. For example: He had been cut to the bone. The bone itself had been cut. Blood welled, like the seasons, unstoppable. Then you turn over and there's a drawing of a woman holding a butcher's knife straight out of *Psycho*. The drawing illustrates a story called "Armageddon on Acacia Avenue," about the end of the world, sigh. Don't get me wrong, the writing quality is very good, but the recurrent death-wish undertone turned it all to ashes in my mouth.

On the non-fiction front there's a "So You Want To Be A Writer" sob story by Jessica Palmer, offering only discouragement because the author took years to get a novel out. Tough. And something that rankled my writer nose: on the inside cover there's an editorial invitation not to send unsolicited manuscripts, whilst across on the contents page you read that Geoff Ryman was to have sent in film reviews but provided two stories instead, oh delight. There is however some good stuff, such as a sparky little article by Bob Shaw saying why he doesn't like computers, a droll diary from Colin Greenland, and an Agony Aunt column from David Langford. Plus a useful 18 pages of reviews covering books, comics, TV, video, and radio. Oh, I liked the "Doctor Decimo" cartoon strip, but not the brown-nosing letters page.

So, what's the verdict? I'd say Nexus is really a groupie horror magazine, and a tad pricey. But since it's glossy and professional, and since there's 18 pages of reviews, you should give it a try for yourself. Note though that this here issue 2 was a year late, so a subscription would be trusting.

Nexus: Where Science Fiction Meets Reality. 58 A4 pages, £2.95 per issue or £10 for a four-issue sub. Available

from Paul Brazier, SF Nexus, PO Box 1123, Brighton, BN1 6EX.

**E**xuberance is a sleek glossy A4 production, 72 fat pages with illos that are just fantastic, for only £1.95. Sure, it's daisywheel printed rather than typeset, but the works of art by guys like Jason Hurst, the Morgan boys, and Dreyfus, make up for it and more. As for the fiction content, issue 5 starts off with the somewhat offbeat "Persisting Despite the Facts" by A.J. Cox; about a studious cultivated community coming to terms with the realization that they are a lost colony. Their

is "The Problem with Jupiter" by P.J.L. Hinder. It's a lively yarn about a super-age bone-dome Otter man visiting his friend of centuries only to find her mind-sharing a subreality called Unicorn Heights with this poisonous little faggot called Jupiter. Yup.

The next one is a weird horror story called "Coming For to Carry You Home" by Steve Saville, about a put-upon black lady and her devil-cheating bloater floater husband. It features sex and murder in a homely sort of way, and in the end the old lady's undead old man comes back for her and it all works out. This is well written and



Artwork by Deirdre Counihan for *Scheherazade*

alien visitors are rumbustious baseball players from the good old US of A, who fight and shout and compete. The story is slow and meant to be, and satisfying.

Next is a tale called "Dream Riders" by Peter Reveley. It's all about these professional dreamers in competition to conjure up bad situations for the benefit of one another and for the mass audio-visual audience. For instance, how about a concrete footpath in a sealed room where the walls are closing in, pushing the water-level higher and higher? Oh, and fat greasy worms wriggling down your throat at the same time? Cinch. Anyhow, there's two interlarded protagonists heading towards in-dream death, this being the "burn out" that leaves them comatose. A likeable story – I was disappointed that it had to go and end.

Unfortunately I can't say the same for "Midnight in My Mind" by Graham Andrews. It's about some dull dude crayoning on a night-time pavement outside a bookshop, finally being dragged by the ankles into the cold fluid asphalt of the road. Imagery, but that's all. As a story it's a load of old tosh, and made irritating by the preponderance of words in "quotes." Then there

rounded. A good story. A tidy little tale is "Forever In a Day" by David Hopkins, about a post-apocalyptic guy lying in the rubble of his house having visions of Roman Legionary ghosts walking through the walls. A bit short, but effective. Last comes a piece called "Verge." It's about a lost-in-space man (Paulo Blair, last seen in *Dream 29*) whose ship is consumed by a megavast alien space beastie. The beastie rescues him like a worm on a wet sidewalk, and so sets him down on a planet. I just loved this story, but seeing as it was I who wrote it – pass.

All in all I'd say the *Exuberance* house style leans towards the atmospheric sort of dark fantasy story, leavened with straight sf. I'm not sure the two are happy bedfellows judging from the opposing views expressed in the letters page. The non-fiction also offers film reviews, book & magazine reviews, an interview with comics author Grant Morrison, and an article on Japanese Manga. All good stuff – well worth a whirl, and as I was saying, the illos are just brill.

Exuberance: 72 A4 pages, £1.95 per issue or £7.00 for a four-issue sub. Available from editor/publisher Jason



Smith at 34 Croft Close, Chipperfield, Herts, WD4 9PA.

**Scheherazade** is a relative shrimp. I know magazines aren't sold by the pound, but whilst *Nexus* and *Exuberance* weighed in at 120 and 180 grammes respectively, *Scheherazade* is forty. And get this little lot... Editor: Liz Counihan; Art Editor: Deirdre Counihan; Production Manager: Nick Szczepanik; Type Liaison: Tim Cookley; Assistants: Brian Combe, Tim Connolly, Mike Counihan, Keith Lankester and Richard Robinson. It reads like the credits on the end of *Ben Hur*, not a small-press magazine. Issue 5 is a thin red A5 booklet numbering 32 pages and giving only three and a bit stories.

The first one, "The Red Marguerite," is a gothic romance written originally in French by Remy de Gourmont around the turn of the century. It's about a late-medieval lady with an eponymous birthmark, who can love only once. Oh, it has character I suppose, but it just isn't my thing. Next is "The Sword of the Mannwy" by Tina Anghelatos, featuring a headstrong woman on a quest for a magic ring and an even magicker sword. It's all a bit familiar, and is told in an unexciting flashback style. Story number three is a vignette called "Afterlife" by John Frizell, where a chap meets a God who is a She. Then there's a two-page instalment of a graphic novel called "King's Daughter" by Jane Gaskell. The last story is called "Knight's Move Thinking" by Catherine Gill, about a nun standing by her sister's coma bed in a mental hospital cowering before a mysterious knight and his big sword.

What else? There is an interesting interview with Gene Wolfe, but no Reader's Letter (note the singular) this time. And much of the artwork leaves something to be desired. All in all *Scheherazade* isn't particularly good value.

*Scheherazade: A Magazine by Women for Women.* The Magazine of Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Gothic Romance. 32 A5 pages, £1.99 per issue or £7.50 for a four-issue sub. Available from Elizabeth Counihan, St Ives, Maypole Road, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 1HL. (John Duffield)

## Escaping the Material World

Mark Jones

Gregory Stephenson's *Out of the Night and Into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard* (Greenwood Press, 1991, £38.70 non-net) follows not exactly hard on the heels of the two earlier studies of Ballard, David Pringle's in

1979 and Peter Brigg's in 1985. It is, though, a sign of the increasing interest in the work of Britain's foremost practitioner of surrealist fiction.

In essence, Stephenson's book is an expansion of an essay he published in *Foundation* 35 (Winter 1985/1986); its weaknesses stem from the fact that it is largely an expansion merely in size and not in scope. His basic thesis is that the "central concern of Ballard's art is... with the problem of exceeding or escaping the limitations of the material world, the space-time continuum, the body, the senses and ordinary ego consciousness, all of which are seen as illusory in nature." It must be said that Stephenson does not find it difficult to apply this to the majority of Ballard's stories. The reading he suggests, however, is somewhat reductive, and many of Ballard's concerns and virtues refuse to be so conveniently packaged. It is slightly tedious to be continually finding references to "two other stories which exhibit this" or "another story which shows that." I had the nagging feeling that I was being poked in the ribs by a talkative obsessive — some might think that this is entirely appropriate, since many have the same opinion of Ballard himself. Ultimately, Stephenson achieves agreement with his opinions through terminal repetition, but the reader is left thinking that there must surely be something more.

On the positive side, though, Stephenson has a clear, readable style. There is little trace of academic obfuscation, and the author seems gratifyingly eager to proceed clearly and completely through the ramifications of his theory. And this is surely a sign that Ballard has at last arrived in the happy hunting ground of Eng Lit academia. This is not a simple guide to Ballard, but an attempt to argue a consistent and apparently controversial theme. Ballard will be popping up in post-graduate studies of the modern novel soon, and it can't be long before we have *Empire of the Sun*, or even *The Drowned World*, on the A-level syllabus.

In itself, though, this book with its high UK price is unlikely to introduce anyone to Ballard's work. Buddhists, Sufis and other assorted individuals still searching for post-1960s transcendental experiences might find Stephenson's book a useful guide to the spiritualist side of Ballard's work. Anyone else I would advise to seek out Peter Brigg's *J.G. Ballard* (Starmont House, 1985) for its sensible and concise guidance through Ballard's career, or David Pringle's *Earth is the Alien Planet: J.G. Ballard's Four-Dimensional Nightmare* (1979), which, though seriously out of date, convincingly conveys the multi-faceted brilliance of Ballard's fiction.

(Mark Jones)

## Green Tyranny or Gung-Ho for the Stars?

Chris Gilmore

Twenty years ago *The Limits to Growth* was published under the auspices of the Club of Rome. It was much more talked-about than read, but its conclusions were clear enough. If current trends continued, they would lead to "global collapse" of industry, agriculture and communications well before the end of the next century. The book came under heavy attack, principally from Herman Kahn and Jerry Pournelle, who noted its absence of any allowance for technical progress, and a certain confusion between what is theoretically impossible and what is only prohibitively expensive. Now the Club of Rome have followed up their original work with a new one called *Beyond the Limits: Global Collapse or a Sustainable Future* by Donella & Dennis Meadows and Jørgen Randers (Earthscan, £9.95).

The attacks, as the authors sorrowfully note, were not always relevant. The World3 computer model on which their new book is based presents a simplified version of the world economy, but the feedback loops which it describes are not contentious. If you take an optimistic view of new food-sources or industrial processes, by all means alter the figures to allow for them. The catastrophe may come a bit later, or be less intense (e.g., only 70% human mortality in one decade, instead of 90%) but come it will, and on an unimaginable scale. In fact they could more reasonably be accused of optimism, since their equations ignore the possibility of hi-tech wars being fought over the last crumbs of non-renewable resources.

Altogether, the statement that doom is coming within a century represents a "robust solution" in terms of the assumptions of the model, within a wide range of variation. Moreover, you can buy World3 on disk and run it on your own PC. There are many more ways the world can go badly wrong than even partly right.

Not being totally deranged, the authors would prefer doom to be averted, and it is in their formulae for survival and "sustainability" that I found this updated version of their vision most repellent. The best they believe to be possible is a world society of about 7.7 billions, with living standards approximating those of South Korea now. It could, they say, be culturally diverse and democratic, with wide personal freedoms under acceptable laws. Population would be stable, with low birth and death rates. It

sounds utopian, if a little dull – but how do we get there?

By means, we are told, of Visioning, Networking, Truth-telling, Learning and Loving. Gulp. None of these terms is definable in a single sentence, but their joint import is that we all need to get busy transforming ourselves into right-on politically correct liberal academics right now. The first step which the authors have achieved, is to disbelieve six ineluctable things before breakfast: "One of the strangest assumptions of present-day models is the widespread idea that a world of moderation must be a world of strict, centralized, government control. We don't believe that kind of control is possible, desirable or necessary."

Other things they presumably don't believe in are religious diversity and religious fervour. The two most popular religions in the world, Roman Catholicism and Islam, are both explicitly opposed to effective control of the reproductive urge by any means other than asceticism. They are probably not rival conspiracies engaged in a race to swamp each other by sheer numbers, but they might just as well be. If by some miracle they were to call the race off, it would do little good; the Mormons and the Hasidic Jews have already joined in, and though they're a long way behind, they're coming up fast.

The authors seem aware that their best solution lacks credibility, since they talk vaguely of "the next revolution," which will bring it about. It will have to be quite as significant as the preceding agricultural and industrial revolutions, they note, without mentioning that both those revolutions were the forced responses of society to technological innovation.

Is there truly no third way between population crash and the Dark Green tyranny that is the subtext of this book? Well, yes, actually. It's Pournelle's solution of splurging all the Earth's non-renewable energy resources in a monstrous R&D push towards an ultra high-tech future, wherein unlimited solar power is taken up by huge orbital stations, polluting industries are banished to the Moon, and basic resources mined from the asteroid belt and the rings of Saturn. It's a desperately high-risk strategy; if it failed it would probably bring the collapse forward by a decade or more. On the other hand, it's not incompatible with the palliative measures of ozone-friendly coolants, recycled drinks cans, nanotechnology and so forth which the authors rightly proclaim are not enough.

I'm sure this is the reverse of the conclusion they would themselves embrace, but I'll stick by it against Visioning, Networking, Truth-telling, Learning and Loving, with or without "strict, centralized government control."

(Chris Gilmore)

## Take Off Your Mirrorshades Andy Robertson

Some sf writers start their careers in the distant future and then work steadily backwards, so that early tales of galactic empires and faster-than-light flight are gradually superseded by just-around-the-corner stories of a near-future earth. The final phase is usually the abandoning of conventional sf altogether, and the writing of non-fiction and/or fantasy, magic realism or "slipstream" set in the present day or located somewhere unmappable. Hard-sf fans may regret it, but this change doesn't necessarily imply a decrease in quality, and sometimes it means just the reverse: sometimes it shows that the writer is dropping the stale clichés of the field and finding a new voice.

If you want examples of this you might consider the progression of Rob Holdstock from his early stories to *Mythago Wood*, or the developments in the writing of M. John Harrison between *The Centauri Device* and *In Viriconium*. Or for the purposes of this review you might think about Bruce Sterling, the spokesman of the (now-defunct?) Cyberpunk movement. It would be incredibly arrogant to predict that Sterling will give up sf – which God forbid – but it isn't hard to trace in his work the sort of change I have described, from *Involution Ocean* through the *Shaper/Mechanist* stories to *Islands in the Net*, and finally to the alternate-history *The Difference Engine*. Some recent short stories like "Dori Bangs" have been only marginally sf, and now Sterling has produced what I believe is his first outright non-fiction work, **The Hacker Crackdown** (Bantam Books, \$22.50).

We have already had an episode or two of this story in *Interzone*: in "The Cyberpunk Bust," his guest column in issue 44, Sterling recounted the events which first led to his involvement. That article concentrated on one particularly farcical facet of the Crackdown, the raid on the worthy Steve Jackson Games, which netted the source of the role-playing game GURPS Cyberpunk apparently in the mistaken belief that it was a manual for computer crime, as well as carting off SJG's computers and disks as "evidence." Of course this was farcical only if you weren't Jackson or one of his employees and facing financial ruin. The impression everyone had at the time was that the raid took place to stop the publication of the game; but the real truth turns out to be longer-winded and more interesting, and though it involves just as thick a chapter of official blunders the law enforce-

ment agencies do come out at the end in a more sympathetic light.

The *Hacker Crackdown* is at least superficially about a series of recent police actions in the USA, primarily aimed at computer fraud, credit-card theft, software piracy, and the like. Some of these initiatives involved action against underground computer networks and hacker groups, and some of these, in turn, stepped on innocents like SJG. It's a long, complex, and at least moderately interesting story, and if you want the full details you'll have to read the book, but all this, of course, is only the surface. What *The Hacker Crackdown* is really about, and what Sterling is really interested in, is the emerging shape of cyberspace – the real cyberspace, not the tech-sexy dreamworld of the typical Cyberpunk novel – and the people who live in it.

The book is divided into four sections. The first part gives a slightly goshwow but essentially accurate description of the developing telecommunications networks that underlie the new medium, and the bugs and glitches that plague them. By his own admission Sterling is not a computer buff, but he is one hell of a journalist, and he most certainly does make it all sound wonderfully thrilling. I must try out some of the phrases and analogies he uses next time our network goes belly up. "It was an enormous landslide in cyberspace, boss...not my fault at all...honest." Ho hum ho. But, niggles about this aside, whether you think the technology is a fascinating human achievement or a bloody mess, it would be a miserable bastard indeed who denied that the unfolding of human societies on the global network is an interesting and perhaps an important thing; and this is what the rest of the book tries to deal with.

The second section concentrates on the "digital underground," a weird mass of overlapping hacker groups, phone phreaks, underground bulletin boards, grading into outright criminals, which was at least partly the cause of and the subject of the Crackdown; the third moves on to give an account of the various law enforcement agencies which carried out the Crackdown; and the fourth is about the groups of civil libertarians who organized a vigorous response to it.

No one is demonized, and no-one comes off scott free: Sterling shows a chameleon-like ability to empathize with everyone and he plainly is not interested in packaging up blame and laying it on somebody's doorstep. In fact, nearly everyone seems to come up smelling of roses: the telco officials, with their ethic of service; the hackers, with their high intelligence and even a homegrown morality (steal no money, crash nothing); the police, with their ethic of service and their

frantically overworked personnel; and the civil libertarians, justly riding high at the time of writing. Nearly everyone comes up smelling of roses, but not quite: it must be admitted that the actual criminals do not come out at all that well, but for a book whose subtitle is "Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier," the criminals hardly get a look in. At a time when computer crime is on the up and up, when software piracy is a mega-dollar industry, Sterling's account of lawbreakers concentrates on a largely harmless subset of counter-cultural weirdos – the hackers.

It's not really hard to understand why. Sterling is not interested in crime, except as part of the background. He is interested in human societies which are developing, or which he believes or hopes are developing in cyberspace. A society needs a morality, and a morality requires people who are at least potentially capable of behaving with self-directed responsibility, in a cooperative way. Hackers may be heavily into infantile rebellious posturing and adolescent competitiveness, but the programme for that is the one that comes written at seventeen atoms to the bit. What is more important about hackers is that, young as they are, they already show intelligence, curiosity, and some motivation other than greed. If people like this can be persuaded to grow up, if they can, for instance, come to understand that the telecom companies and the police are human too, they can be made into citizens of cyberspace, and perhaps they can help build cyberspace. They have the potential, as criminals do not, of learning to work with their old enemies. More than that: they have the potential to change their old enemies, in ways that those enemies could never change themselves. They can help make something wonderful.

A society needs laws, as well as morals, if it grows beyond the size where everyone can know everyone else (which seems to be about 150 people). But America is miserably over-provided with laws and lawyers, and there are already plenty of laws in cyberspace which no-one understands or can use. What is needed to give the nascent communities life and breath is human intelligence, human interaction, forgiveness, humour, the transformation of aggression into alliance. The cutting edge of moral development is always the point of greatest strain and conflict: the real laws of human behaviour in cyberspace, the unwritten rules that everyone in future will follow without thinking, are being forged now.

That's Sterling's dream, I think. He tries, with a fair success, to show it happening, and while I was reading *The Hacker Crackdown* I really

believed in it myself. Superficially it may seem a bit of a surprise to read this sort of thing from one of the two great arch-Cyberpunks, but it is in no way inconsistent with Sterling's sf, which has consistently shown an autonomous, responsible, disillusioned and humane morality ever since *The Artificial Kid*. I note that Sterling has taken several pages in the latest *SF Eye* to explain his attitude to computer crime in more detail, and I can only wish all strength to his arm, for if anyone has the authority to write this sort of book and these sorts of article, it's surely chairman Bruce.

I liked this book very much. But I can't help noting that, in terms of the numbers of people involved and the amount of money at stake, this "digital underground" is tiny compared to the real computer criminals. And I can't help thinking it's going to take an awfully long time to wean some of these kids off their thrills. The thrill of virtual lawbreaking; the thrill of publishing wanky little countercultural manifestos; the thrill of pretending, in an almost totally safe way, to be a rebel; the thrill of ripping off creative artists and public utilities both, and then proclaiming in great detail why you're in the right. The thrill of shouting out that society is utterly corrupt, but that you are one of a band of brave anarchists keeping the flame of freedom alight. The thrill – let's be brutally honest – of being, or at least pretending to be, a cyberpunk. Small "c." It's been a lot of harmless fun, but it's time to take off the mirrorshades. Will the kids grow up? (Andy Robertson)

## UK Books Received August 1992

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Adams, Douglas. *Mostly Harmless*. "The fifth book in the increasingly inaccurately named *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* trilogy." Heinemann, ISBN 0-434-00926-1, 219pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 5th October 1992.

Ahern, Jerry. *The Survivalist: The Legend*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57101-7, 383pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1991; this appears to be the 21st [or perhaps 22nd] novel in this futuristic war series, and contains a three-page "Author's Note" on its history.) 3rd September 1992.

Anthony, Piers. *Fractal Mode*. "The second novel in the bestselling *Mode* series." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13861-0, 302pp,

hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 7th September 1992.

Anthony, Piers. *Virtual Mode*. "Beginning his greatest ever series." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21346-5, 381pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 55.) 10th September 1992.

Bailey, Robin. *Brothers of the Dragon*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55671-9, 252pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; first in a new series.) 3rd September 1992.

Bova, Ben. *Mars*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57717-1, 502pp, paperback, no price shown. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1992; proof copy received; another large and scientifically well-informed novel about the colonization of Mars [compare Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, below], this one comes with anomic from the likes of Ray Bradbury, Orson Scott Card and James A. Michener.) 7th January 1993.

Cochran, Molly, and Warren Murphy. *The Forever King*. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-018-2, 364pp, hardcover, £14.99; 1-85798-012-3, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 17th September 1992.

Constantine, Storm. *Burying the Shadow*. "A fantastic reinvigoration of the vampire myth." Headline, ISBN 0-2472-3877-4, 406pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) September 1992?

Crowther, Peter, ed. *Narrow Houses, Volume 1*. "Tales of Superstition, Suspense and Fear." Introduction by Douglas E. Winter. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-03957-9, xlii+460pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense anthology, first edition; proof copy received; this debut anthology by a regular contributor to our sister magazine, *MILLION*, contains an extraordinarily rich roster of names, including Ray Bradbury, Pat Cadigan, Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll, Nancy A. Collins, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Gallagher, Ed Gorman, Robert Holdstock, Peter James, Stephen Laws, James Lovegrove, Ian McDonald, Kim Newman, William F. Nolan, Nicholas Royle, Darrell Schweitzer, Brian Stableford, Steve Rasnic Tem, Andrew Vachas, Ian Watson, Chet Williamson and J.N. Williamson; all stories are original – let's hope they live up to their authors' reputations.) 10th December 1992.

Davies, Paul, and John Gribbin. *The Matter Myth: Beyond Chaos and Complexity*. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013426-3, 314pp, paperback, £6.99. (Popular science text, first published in 1991.) 27th August 1992.

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rule Britannia*. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-986630-7, 301pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in 1972; it's about a near-future American "takeover" of Britain.) 3rd September 1992.

Eddings, David. *The Sapphire Rose: The Elenium, Book Three*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20374-5, 652pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 55.) 10th September 1992.

Egan, Greg. *Quarantine*. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-9870-1, 219pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (SF novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; this is the much-heralded debut sf novel by Australian writer Egan; it's a pity the publishers didn't send us an advance proof copy months ago [or even a hardcover copy of the finished book]; they'll have to wait for the review.) 10th September 1992.



Forstchen, William R. **Terrible Swift Sword: The Lost Regiment #3**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016750-1, 456pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 24th September 1992.

Fraser, Antonia, ed. **The Pleasure of Reading**. Foreword by Sir Simon Hornby. Illustrated by many hands. Bloomsbury, ISBN 0-7475-0813-5, 256pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Essay collection, first edition; this de luxe volume, funded by W.H. Smith's, who gave away copies to their staff earlier this year in order to mark the company's 200th birthday), contains interesting essays by some 40 writers; among the big names, those of at least marginal sf-and-fantasy interest include Margaret Atwood, J.G. Ballard, John Fowles, Doris Lessing, Brian Moore and Emma Tennant; the five-page Ballard piece is a gem – among his 'favourite books' he includes the Los Angeles Yellow Pages, Jean Baudrillard's *America and The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*.) August 1992.

Gallagher, Stephen. **Nightmare**, with Angel. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-52229-6, 410pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; this looks to be Gallagher's meatiest work yet, twice the size of most of his previous novels.) 3rd September 1992.

Harrison, Payne. **Thunder of Erebus**. "Author of the worldwide bestseller *Storming Intrepid*." Arrow, ISBN 0-09-996160-1, ix+496pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future technothriller, first published in the USA, 1991; set in Antarctica in 1998, it involves the usual out-of-date rivalry between America and the Soviet Union.) 3rd September 1992.

Herman, Richard, Jr. **Firebreak**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57452-0, 502pp, paperback, £4.99. (Technothriller, first published in the USA, 1991; about a renewed, near-future war with Iraq, this book's scenario seems to have been more timely than many others in its genre; the US Air Force veteran author has previously written such titles as *The Worldbirds* and *Force of Eagles*.) 3rd September 1992.

Hutson, Sean. **Captives**. Warner, ISBN 0-7155-0004-6, 434pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1991.) 24th September 1992.

Hutson, Sean. **Heathen**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-356-20265-8, 312pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 24th September 1992.

James, Laurence. **Beyond the Grave: Dark Future**, 2. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-44043-2, 125pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; see comments on the first volume in this series, below.) 13th August 1992.

James, Laurence. **The Revengers: Dark Future**, 1. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-44042-4, 142pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition; set in a devastated world of the 21st century; but hasn't the series title "Dark Future" already been spoken for? – GW Books published an anthology and three novels by "Jack Yeovil" that that banner in 1990-91.) 13th August 1992.

Jones, Stephen. **The Mammoth Book of Vampires**. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-108-0, 553pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; contains mainly reprint stories by Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, M.R. James, Edgar Allan Poe, Brian Stableford, Bram Stoker, Howard Waldrop and many others; the Kim Newman novella "Red Reign" is original to the book.) 14th September 1992.

Ketterer, David. **Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy**. Indiana University Press (distributed in the UK by Open University

Press, 22-26 Ballmoor, Buckingham, MK18 1XW), ISBN 0-253-33122-6, xi+206pp, hardcover, £22.50. (Critical study of Canadian fantastic writing, first published in the USA, 1992; the Canadian sf writers mentioned range from James De Mille, author of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1880), to Margaret Atwood, author of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985); many others who happen to have spent part of their lives in Canada [e.g. William Gibson, Spider Robinson and even Britain's Michael Coney] are also co-opted; it's a mile unconvincing at times, but an interesting book.) 1st September 1992.

Lackey, Mercedes. **Magic's Price: Book Three of The Last Herald-Mage**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-016753-6, 351pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 27th August 1992.

Laymon, Richard. **Blood Games**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3821-9, 470pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 60.) 10th September 1992.

Laymon, Richard. **Midnight's Lair**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0567-1, 253pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Richard Kelly".) 10th September 1992.

MacAvoy, R.A. **King of the Dead**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3854-5, 286pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; second in the trilogy which began with the highly praised *Lens of the World*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 54.) 24th September 1992.

Maitland, Ian. **Cathedral**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0540-X, 310pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut novel by a British writer born in 1935.) 10th September 1992.

Neiderman, Andrew. **Sister, Sister**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-979600-7, 292pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 3rd September 1992.

Newman, Kim. **Anno Dracula**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-8571-7185-5, 359pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; a sequel by another hand to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and a fine, meaty fictional study of the entire *Dracula* myth; recommended.) 12th October 1992.

Pratchett, Terry. **Lords and Ladies**. "A Discworld Novel." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05223-6, 275pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 12th November 1992.

Preiss, Byron, ed. **The Ultimate Werewolf**. Introduction by Harlan Ellison. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3832-4, 373pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; contains mainly new stories on a lycanthropic theme from Jerome Charyn, Nancy A. Collins, Philip José Farmer, Stuart M. Kaminsky, Kathe Koja, Pat Murphy, Larry Niven, Robert Silverberg and others, plus a short filmography by Leonard Wolf.) 24th September 1992.

Roberts, Keith. **Kaeti on Tour**. Sirius Book Company (PO Box 122, Feltham, Middx. TW14 8HY), ISBN 1-874689-01-6, 320pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Fantasy collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed, limited slipcased edition priced at £35 [not seen]; this is the sequel volume to *Kaeti & Company*, 1986.) 15th October 1992.

Robinson, Kim Stanley. **Red Mars**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-24-613881-5, 504pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; reviewed from an advance proof by John Clute in *Interzone* 63.) 24th September 1992.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The White Mists of Power**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-001-8, 265pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [listed in *Interzone* 65].) 17th September 1992.

Shatner, William. **TekLab**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32472-1, 223pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; third in the "Lake Canadian" futuristic adventure series, widely believed to have been ghostwritten by sf veteran Ron Goulart.) 17th September 1992.

Shippey, Tom, ed. **The Oxford Book of Science Fiction Stories**. Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-214204-6, xxvi+587pp, hardcover, £16.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; a few months ago, I called for an *Oxford Book of SF*, and it seems they had one in preparation after all: Professor Shippey provides a learned introduction and a fine selection of stories ranging from 1903 to 1990; the two most recent pieces, by Paul McAuley and David Brin, are taken from *Interzone*, so we can't complain; other authors represented include Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, James Blish, Arthur C. Clarke, Thomas M. Disch, Harry Harrison, William Gibson, Rudyard Kipling, Ursula Le Guin, Walter M. Miller, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, Clifford D. Simak, Cordwainer Smith, Bruce Sterling, A.E. van Vogt, H.G. Wells, Jack Williamson and Gene Wolfe; rather surprisingly, there's nothing by Asimov or Heinlein; nevertheless, definitely recommended.) 15th October 1992.

Silverberg, Robert. **Kingdoms of the Wall**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-33719-3, 288pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 7th September 1992.

Stableford, Brian. **Young Blood**. Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-71757-X, 328pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf/horror novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 21st September 1992.

Sutton, David, and Stephen Jones, eds. **Dark Voices 4: The Pan Book of Horror**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32476-4, 317pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; proof copy received; contains mainly new stories by John Brunner, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Gallagher, Peter James, Joe R. Lansdale, Graham Masterton, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle and others.) 9th October 1992.

Tuttle, Lisa. **Memories of the Body: Tales of Desire and Transformation**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21362-7, 210pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 64.) 10th September 1992.

Vinge, Vernor. **A Fire Upon the Deep**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-003-4, 391pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [listed in *Interzone* 64]; reviewed from the American edition by John Clute in *Interzone* 51.) 17th September 1992.

Wingrove, David. **The White Mountain: Chung Kuo, Book Three**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-56847-4, 677pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; the fourth volume of this huge series, *The Stone Within*, is scheduled for hardcover publication in December.) 3rd September 1992.

## Overseas Books Received

Asimov, Isaac, Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **The Mammoth Book of Fantastic Science Fiction: Short Novels of the 1970s**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-795-X, 535pp, trade paperback,



\$9.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the UK, 1992; contains stories by Paul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Larry Niven, Frederik Pohl, Robert Silverberg, John Varley, Joan D. Vinge and others.) 14th August 1992.

Ballentine, Lee. **Dream Protocols**. Collages by Richard Kadrey. Tallman [Box 321, Beech Grove, IN 46107, USA], ISBN 0-9628708-1-2, 95pp, trade paperback, \$9.95. (Sf/anthology poetry collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 20th October 1992.

Bear, Greg. **Heads**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51996-5, 151pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1990; we serialized it in *Interzone* issues 37 and 38.) Late entry: June 1992 publication, received in August.

Burgess, Michael. **Reference Guide to Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror**. Libraries Unlimited [PO Box 6633, Englewood, CO USA, ISBN 0-87287-611-3], xv+403pp, hardcover, \$45 [\$54 outside North America]. (Guide to reference books about sf, fantasy and horror; first edition; this is yet another "book about books about books"; nevertheless, it is a valuable one, putting to shame earlier half-baked efforts such as Keith L. Justice's *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Reference: An Annotated Bibliography* [1989]; Michael Burgess seems to have covered everything, and his critical comments are pithy and well-informed; this should become the standard work of its type; highly recommended to libraries, bibliographers and all serious sf collectors.) Late entry: April 1992 publication, received in August.

Cadigan, Pat. **Fools**. "Spectra Special Editions." Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29512-8, 299pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the new book by the most recent winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award [for her previous novel, *Synners*].) November 1992.

Collins, Helen. **Mutagenesis**. Tor, no ISBN shown, 339pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; "adventure and intellectual intrigue on a far planet"; a debut novel by a new American writer.) February 1993.

De Haven, Tom. **The Last Human: Chronicles of the King's Tramp**. Book 3. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09011-9, 277pp, hardcover, \$22.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 16th November 1992.

Feist, Raymond E. **The King's Buccaneer**. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-23625-5, x+465pp, hardcover, \$20. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the latest in the long-running "Riftwar" series.) November 1992.

Feist, Raymond E. **Magician**. "The author's preferred edition." Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-42630-5, xv+681pp, hardcover, \$22. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1982; proof copy received; the first of the "Riftwar" books; this edition is considerably longer than the original, restoring text which was previously cut.) November 1992.

Flint, Kenneth C. **Legends Reborn**. "Ancient Ireland and modern New York collide..." Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-29919-0, 385pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) December 1992.

Garrett, Randall, and Laurence M. Janifer. **Brain Twister**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-845-X, 144pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1962; the original edition had the byline "Mark Phillips"; another hoary "classic" from this commendable publisher, first serialized in *Astounding* in 1959.) 14th August 1992.

Goldstein, Lisa. **Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon**. Tor, no ISBN shown, 301pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; "a rich intense tale of the Faerie Queen and her court invading London in Elizabethan times to fight a magical battle for the reborn King Arthur.") February 1993.

Gunn, James, ed. **The Best of Astounding: Classic Short Novels from the Golden Age of Science Fiction**. Introduction by Paul Anderson, Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-808-5, x+438pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf anthology, first published in the USA as part of a three-volume book-club set, 1990; it contains novella-length stories by Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, Murray Leinster, H.P. Lovecraft, James Blish and Paul Anderson; the original, much larger, version of this anthology was published to mark the 60th anniversary of *Astounding* [Analog magazine.] 14th August 1992.

Hogan, James P. **The Multiplex Man**. Bantam Spectra, ISBN 0-553-08999-4, 359pp, hardcover, \$20. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 16th November 1992.

Jones, Stephen. **The Mammoth Book of Vampires**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-796-8, 553pp, trade paperback, \$9.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 1992; contains mainly reprint stories by Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Ramsey Campbell, M.R. James, Kim Newman, Edgar Allan Poe, Brian Stableford, Bram Stoker, Howard Waldrop and many others.) 15th September 1992.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn, ed. **The Best of Pulphouse: The Hardback Magazine**. Foreword by Kate Wilhelm. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-08317-3, 328pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf/anthology, first published in 1991; contains 25 stories from the much-praised *Pulphouse* (although two of the pieces, "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick and "Jamaica V" by Geoffrey A. Landis, first appeared in *Interzone*); among the other contributors are Alan Brennert, Edward Bryant, Nancy A. Collins, Charles de Lint, George Alec Effinger, Greg Egan, Harlan Ellison, Lisa Goldstein, Kathe Koja, Thomas F. Monteleone, Harry Turtledove, Lisa Tuttle and Jane Yolen; reviewed by Neil Jones and Neil McIntosh in *Interzone* 62.) 14th September 1992.

Simak, Clifford D. **Ring Around the Sun**. Introduction by Harry Harrison, Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-852-2, 205pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1953; an old favourite, recommended.) 14th August 1992.

Stephenson, Gregory. **Out of the Night and Into the Dream: A Thematic Study of the Fiction of J.G. Ballard**. "Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 47." Greenwood Press, ISBN 0-313-27922-5, 182pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Critical study of a leading sf writer, first edition; by an American author who lives in Denmark, it's a substantial study of Ballard's work up to and including *Running Wild* [1988]; recommended.) Late entry: 1991 publication, received in August 1992; sent to us by the author.

Stockbridge, Grant. **The Spider, Master of Men! #4**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-898-0, 319pp, paperback, \$4.95. (Fantasy/adventure omnibus, first edition; contains two novellas, "Death Reign of the Vampire King" and "The Pain Emperor," first published in *The Spider pulp* magazine in 1935; Grant Stockbridge was a house pseudonym used mainly by Norvell Page.) 15th September 1992.

Vonarbarg, Elisabeth. **In the Mothers' Land**. "Spectra Special Editions." Translated by Jane Brierley. Bantam Spectra, ISBN

0-553-29962-X, 487pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first published [in French] in Canada, 1992; proof copy received; some of the feminist big guns have been wheeled out to praise this one - Ursula Le Guin, Julian May, Pamela Sargent, etc.) December 1992.

Wolfe, Gene. **Nightside the Long Sun**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85207-X, 333pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; hot news! - it's volume one in a new tetralogy called "Starcrosser's Planetfall" set in the same universe as Wolfe's "Urb" books; volume two, *Lake of the Long Sun*, is already written and should be out about six months after this first volume; it looks as though this series is going to be a work of the same length as Wolfe's previous award-winning tetralogy, "The Book of the New Sun"; according to David Hartwell's accompanying publicity letter, it's "another masterpiece of sf in the making.") April 1993.

Wolfe, Sebastian, ed. **Reel Terror**. "The original stories that inspired the great horror movies..." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-812-2, 249pp, trade paperback, \$9.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 1992; contains such well-known items as "Duel" by Richard Matheson, "The Fly" by George Langelaan and "The Company of Wolves" by Angela Carter; apparently a British edition appeared from Xanadu - has anyone seen it?) 14th August 1992.

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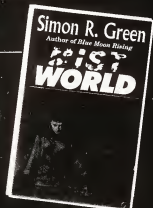
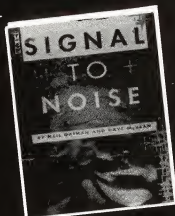
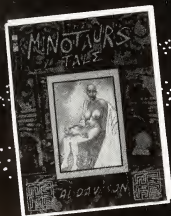
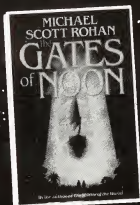
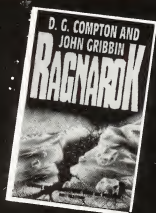
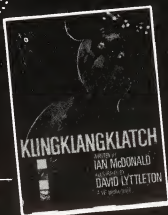
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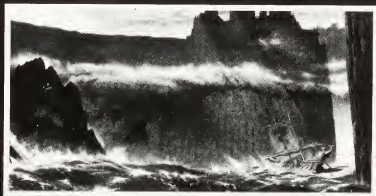
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